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OUT OF SIGHT

A Story

BY

MRS. JANE LIPPITT PATTERSON

Deep as the spell of dreams,
When sleep's soft curtain o'er the heart descends,
Above my sight, with all its glory-streams,
The Upper Kingdom bends.

ANNE L. MARVIN.

BOSTON

UNIVERSALIST PUBLISHING HOUSE

1883

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TO MY NEPHEW,

Wm. L. M.

WHOSE QUESTIONS DETERMINED THE TITLE, AND DIRECTED THE
CURRENT OF MUCH OF ITS PHILOSOPHY;

IN THE HOPE

THAT MANHOOD MAY BRING FULFILMENT TO HIS NOBLE CHILDISH DREAMS;
AND HONOR THE NAME AND MEMORY OF HIS BELOVED MOTHER, WHO
IS EVER PRESENT IN OUR HEARTS, THOUGH VEILED FROM
OUR LONGING VISION BY THE MYSTERY OF THE
IMMORTAL INHERITANCE OUT OF SIGHT;

THIS VOLUME IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED

BY THE AUTHOR.



P R E F A C E.

SOMETIMES we write from the pressure of an inward impulse, sometimes to satisfy a demand of literature or the urgent wish of the publisher. If the enthusiasm of work fills and makes alive the outward call, there may be as much of power in the more deliberate study, as in the achievement which burns away the life with sudden flame.

The story which is here given to our readers was written in response to a request from the Publishing House. It was thought that our Sunday-School literature needed stories illustrating our faith in the action of daily life. It had been my good fortune to write a book which was favorably received, and for this reason the privilege of writing a denominational story was given to me.

After much deliberation I accepted the responsible trust, and sought its fulfilment with earnest and consecrated purpose. Having suffered from the gloom of the old creeds, from which, thank God, I was early delivered; and being closely associated through family and friends with those whose lives had known awful darkness before they found the light, the subject greatened in my thoughts, and material came as on wings from the realm of real life.

I have taken the novelist's liberty in the setting of my characters. Real life did not group them in time and space exactly as I have done, but the story is full of imprints struck from the granite of experience; and the good and ill, the joy and sorrow of men and women whom I have known is hopefully repeated here.

My story was first published in the "Ladies' Repository." While the year was passing which gave it birth, the Publishing House changed agents. As it appeared anonymously, I kept a sorrowful silence over the fact that "a king had arisen who knew not Joseph."

Lately the request came to me to write a serial for the "Christian Leader." I replied that a better story was hidden by the years than I could ever write again: I had poured into it the best strength of my life, and the subject, touching as it did the eternal verities, could never grow old.

And this is how my story with the ominous title comes to light, asking audience in your homes and hearts, with the hope that it may help somewhat in transmuting "the faith once delivered to the saints" into those "living epistles known and read of all men,"—the characters of our people, and that some who sit in darkness and "the valley and shadow of death" may find threading its simple pages the light of life.

J. L. P.

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OUT OF SIGHT.

CHAPTER I.

CLOUDS WITH SILVER LININGS.

SITTING by my window with three-years-old Ned across my knee, and trying to answer his quaint and many questions, it fell to my lot to tell him the literal meaning of "Out of Sight." As the street throng pressed hither and thither, and some fantastic hat or many-hued dress made a special mark for observation, I tried to still his little, perplexing tongue by pointing to an object for his keen, black eyes. But Ned is too young to follow accurately the nod of your head or the point of your finger. And not yet is he able to understand elaborate descriptions of attire, though he is thus early somewhat fastidious about the colors of his own jacket, and the quality and cue of his cap and shoes. He is pretty sure to put on the new cap if he can reach it, and ask for the high-laced boots if there are any signs of a walk on the street with "Papa."

But this time the object to which I tried to direct him,—a pretty young girl arrayed in the latest Parisian incongruities, with something very queer upon her head,—turned the corner, and could no longer be seen; and to his eager, "Where, where?" I told him she was out of sight.

"What is 'out of sight?'"

"You see the corner of the street yonder, Ned?"

"Yes, Neddy sees that, over there."

"Well, you watch those little boys going that way, and when you can no longer see them they are out of sight, — that is, they have turned the corner, and are off so far little Ned's eyes, though very bright ones, cannot see them."

"Is that 'out of sight?'"

"Yes, my boy, that is what we mean when we say out of sight. It may be people turning the corner of the street; and it may be your woollen ball hidden in Jack's blanket; sometimes you know you cannot see your playthings; they are, perhaps under some larger article, and when your little bright eyes cannot see them they are out of sight."

The child was satisfied with my explanation, and kept on plying his wonderful questions. I answered him mechanically, all the while thinking of the subtler meanings of the three little words I had tried to make him understand.

Out of Sight! Surely it is not all interpreted by the turn of a street-corner, or the hidden playthings of our prattlers. The click of a door between us and a friend's face, and the puff of steam or flutter of sail, which signalize his farther passage from our hearth-stone, are but material veils which shut the scene to visual organs. If that friend is truly ours, and not merely nominally so, we can see him and sit down for a pleasant chat by the side of his arm-chair, though the door between us were a continent, and the sail of his ship fluttered on the other shore of either sea.

There are two kinds of eyes in the world. We carry one kind in our faces, and by help of them pick our way over the little rocks and through the scrub-oak and brier pastures which sometimes diversify the path of life. We use them, too, for mediums of happiness. All the silvery, winding rivers, the high and awful mountains, the wide lakes and level prairies, the everlasting sea; and the fisher's boat, the oak, the ship, the bird, the cloud, the butterfly, the flower, the green leaf and grass — other human eyes and beautiful faces where they sit sentinel, and the blue sky above us in sun or starlight, which make earth so wonderfully fair and full, come to us in their magnificence or little loveliness, and speak their grand and inspiring, or tender and soothing, language as we gaze upon them with these eyes which we carry in our faces. We look with our material eyes upon material forms; and so long as we are largely associated with these, and in a sense made up of them, we shall find a large measure of happiness coming through the medium of visual sight.

While these "temples of God" stand on the shores of time, they will, if pervaded by a just estimate of life and its relations, adapt themselves to present conditions. The earth with its vast variety, and our human bodies, which are made for contact and work amid material things, are not despicable in themselves. They are the handiwork of the great Creator, who made the laws of adaptation, and whom we should honor for the subtle blending of soul and clay; and though we honor most the soul, we have no business to despise the house it lives in, though it be con-

structed of perishable atoms. And in all I may say of that other sight, and that inner realm where it finds its scenes of entrancing beauty, I trust I shall not be betrayed by the glory of the hidden realm into disparaging estimates of men and women as they seem to the outer view, and trees and cornfields as they leaf, or rustle in ripeness, for the help of man undissected, — man as mortal man.

I believe there is an inner world fairer than mother Nature. I believe the soul of man is finer than his flesh, and that his thoughts, and resolves, and aspirations are often nobler and better than the life he makes manifest among his fellows. I know this to be a fact in my own inner life, and I have read the same in the silent revelation of the few who, at my knock, have opened the secret door. Of some of these I will try to bring you accurate pictures, believing that simple truth most helps us to do well.

Wesley Sanford was one of two brothers. His father was a small farmer, in a region where farming is not a very productive avocation. The banks of the Susquehanna in the vicinity of Otsego Lake are not so fertile as they become after the stream has widened to a river whereon go ships, and stretched itself across the land of Penn, in its sure search for the wider bay and outer sea. And then, Loudon Sanford had settled in Otsego when somewhat advanced in life, and decidedly discouraged, so that his attempt at farming may not have been made with the determination to cause the earth to yield her largest increase, which a fresh-hearted and younger man would have felt. Besides,

he was city-bred, and such people always make poor farmers. They have a fund of book-knowledge on the subject, but lack all practice, and must serve an apprenticeship before they "know the ropes," in this as well as other departments of labor. He had sold silks by the wholesale, and broadcloths by the piece, and watched the return of his richly-laden ships as they came with flying sails up their New England harbor. At one time he owned a large share in several of these precarious sea-birds, and kept his wholesale store full and active besides. He did a heavy business as a merchant, and thought there was no sand under his feet. But there was water about the keels of his ships,—this he found out at length, when awful storms wrecked them and his earthly fortune at a single gust. So, as I said, he was disheartened, and, gathering up a little remnant, he left the city where he had moved among its princes, and, taking Rachel his wife, and the two boys, Wesley and Charles, children of their old age, they slipped away from the friendships based on estimates of money, and tried farming among simple strangers on the banks of the Susquehanna.

It was a pleasant place where Wesley passed the years of his childhood. There was fine scenery of slope, and vale, and wood. He had a good chance of play-ground, and liked it better than a few feet square of city back-yard, where the sun never comes, and no green thing thrives. He and Charles were tolerably happy children, and did not miss the refinements of other days as their parents did. They were too young to care for these. Childhood is nearer the heart of

nature than we are with our coming gray, and there is sympathy in the young life for all the sweet manifestations of growth which the field and tree wear in the different seasons. Their new coats were of necessity somewhat coarser than they had ever worn, but the conditions were changed, and the coarser fabric but corresponded with the altered condition. The neighbors wore plain coats, so there was not the old street show to taunt them with the disparity between then and now. Loudon remembered the past somewhat regretfully, and took up life's work too heavy-hearted for any success. And so between the sterile soil and the poor management, the small farm but just supported the four, and left little over for outlays in improvements of the land, or the culture of the growing boys. They had six months a year at the district school, and then when they were large enough to handle the hoe, and the rake, the rest of life was work-life, and they were Loudon's only helpful hands. They were glad to be helpers, and it was one of their happiest days when they planted corn for the first time. Both these boys took up life cheerfully, and boyhood to them was as pleasant as often falls to the lot of children.

But thought was beginning to unfold its mystery, and the life of Wesley was not all satisfied by the sight of nature about the little spot which he called home. There were questions knocking at the door of his heart which the lessons he learned at school made no attempt to answer. He read in his books about God, the Creator. He saw the works of one immensely above human comprehension every time he

looked out over field or forest. The sprouting kernel had a mysterious language, and often he leaned over his hoe rapt in meditation, and Loudon and Charles went on with their rows and left him idly dreaming, as they thought. He was gifted with a nature profoundly reverent and religious. Praise mingled with awe and mystery, and, while he could not understand, he devoutly adored. Life amid nature deepened these inner currents, and as the years swept by, bearing him to the border of manhood, the questions which broke the spell of his meditations were too profound for parental knowledge to solve.

The home of Loudon Sanford was very often a stopping-place for the mission-priests of his order. He was a Methodist, as you may know by the names he gave his boys. When Wesley had the opportunity from the farm-work which was weaving its net of care about him, he questioned them until their religious framework tottered; though the zeal and devotion of this sect he profoundly revered.

It was a pain to his parents to see their boy drifting from the safe moorings of the church which they deemed infallible. They thought it the next thing to infidelity to question the long-received tenets of the church. They tried to settle his doubts by assuring him of the constantly increasing strength of their favorite sect, and of the fact that its prominent ideas are received as valid by nearly all the land of Christendom. This argument did not touch the root of the matter in the mind of the boy. Total depravity looked no less hideous because millions professed to believe it; neither did the fires of hell burn less lurid

when contemplated in the light of such a wide and unquestioning faith. These ideas were awful to his mind, so reverently strung, and seemed a blasphemy of the great Giver of sun and rain, of seed-time and harvest. Young Wesley's God was the God of nature. He was fast losing confidence in the Bible as a revelation from the same being who set his bow in the clouds, and the light of his stars along the dark of night. He had never read this Word for himself. He had listened to its interpretation as he sat in the high-backed pew of the simple meeting-house, or on some board-seat under the shadow of "God's first temples," when unusual religious interest swayed the community, stirred by the excitement of camp-meeting. He listened to it daily at home, for his father was a devout man, and observed all the customs of his order. But he believed that the doctrines, so revolting to his sense of right and justice, were written on the pages where these interpreters so confidently assumed to find them, and, thus believing, he drifted farther and farther from the fastenings of his father's faith. A sea of unrest swept its waves about his heart, as the gulf widened between his faith in nature and the Bible. But he clung to the teachings of that voice which did not shock his soul with monstrous conclusions. He knew how many saints and martyrs had gathered strength for life and death from the pages of the book which they believed a revelation from God, and, honoring their saintly characters, he was full of trouble that he, too, could not gather help from the same source. Not without great pangs, and days and nights of agonizing wrestling, did he come to the

awful conclusion of disavowing his faith in the written Word. But it was honestly reached. Prayer and communion paved the way. The voices of Spring, and Summer, and Autumn called him to the crisis. The falling of the rain baptized his heart in an impartial love, urging him on. The sunshine warmed a devotion which could send up its spontaneous incense at no divided altar. A Father bent above the fields, and woods, and silver river, and reaching out his arms to him with a child's trust, and a true child's sense of real fatherhood, he vowed in his heart he would never again listen to interpretations of the God of nature as other than a Father. He would hear no more the mumbling of that written Word which belied his true character; he would spurn it as a giant lie.

Had Wesley Sanford read for himself, before the current of his thought swept off so far, all would have been different. But it never once occurred to him that the interpreters could be mistaken. The fact that all the Christian world, so far as he knew, accepted this interpretation, silenced every faintest desire for personal investigation. He believed there was but one alternative,—acceptance of the popular interpretation of the Bible, or denial of its authenticity. And so believing, he honestly reached the outspoken denial. But in this he erred; looking through the eyes of others, and not his own; failing to read for himself the *written* revelation as he had tried to read the voices of the outer world, and look through nature's garments to the Great Soul out of sight.

This is the way he shocked the house. Loudon took down the family Bible, and, seating himself, laid it across his knee while he wiped his spectacles and adjusted them. Rachel touched gently the last seam of her work-day cares, and, dropping quietly into her arm-chair, folded her hands and bowed her head in reverent posture. Charles rustled the leaves of his arithmetic, and clattered his slate into a hurried square position for the night, while his mischievous pencil grated a flourish or two by way of parting salute. Then he stretched his fast-growing and somewhat long legs out so that the fire might softly wrap them, and thus preparations for bed and eternity go on at one and the same time.

Wesley was reading a book. He kept on reading. He was all absorbed in pre-Adamite mysteries, and had not noticed the preparations for prayers. Loudon waited a moment. He did not know what it was to be lost in reading, and supposed Wesley desired to come to a good stopping-place; perhaps the bottom of the page. But the keen eye of the old man soon saw a leaf slipping over. "Wesley!" he spoke, sharply. Wesley started, and looked up.

"It is prayer-time, boy; put away your book."

Wesley arose deliberately, and laid his book on a swinging shelf by the side of the great chimney. Then, turning and standing in the full light of the blazing fire, he folded his arms across his breast, and looked steadily at his father.

"Sit down, Wesley;" and Loudon Sanford put his finger on the open page, as though to begin the reading.

Wesley did not sit down; but in the light as he stood there, almost a man in stature, with a face of rare strength, and, consequently, truest beauty, the three could not help seeing the writhing of some inward struggle before the boy made known its import. There was brief silence, as if waiting his obedience, all eyes upon him, and then the silence was broken by a voice which almost paralyzed the old and saintly pair.

"I will not sit down, father. Neither will I stay within the sound of your voice or any other voice reading that Book. It is not God's word; it is a lie!" And before the amazement of the parents could find words, Wesley had taken his hat and clicked the door-latch behind him.

After a while the chapter was read, faintly, and the prayer offered, full of parental pleading for the "apostate son."

Wesley walked fast in the stinging winter air. He was not conscious of direction or distance. The realm out of sight was the one in which he moved, and the inner eyes were busy with their explorations. He looked upon the sea of unrest which so long had dashed its foaming waves against his heart, and it was deeper and darker than before. His outspoken words had not set him in right relations. His honest soul thought them needed words; but something was wrong; he was not at peace. He tried to analyze his turbulent emotions. Was it the pain he had inflicted on his parents which made the waves dash higher? That was not all. What had he said? He had called the Bible a lie in the presence of witnesses. The

Bible from which so many saints have drawn their inspiration; the Bible whose law had been the rule of his mother's wise, and calm, and true life. She was a mature woman; he was but a boy. She was a learned woman, reared in the midst of the best opportunities. He had profound reverence for his mother. She was intellectually strong as well as saintly. He could see her superiority with his boy's eyes. What did he know in comparison with her knowledge? He, not out of his teens, and she, with the ripeness of half a century dropping its fruit of experience. This thought of mother disturbed him most. The old saints and martyrs were wonderful people, but for authority he would sooner turn to his mother. He had listened many times in rapt awe when she talked with the ministers. None of them had such rare language and so wide a range. He was proud of her in these honorable comparisons.

She was queenly, too, in her figure and mien. When she walked among the simple neighbors, it was easy to see she was of a finer type, and yet she was simple as a child, and listened to their small talk with interest. Her eyes, with their dreamy, liquid look, were the windows of a great soul. Wesley thought there were never such deep-seeing eyes before. She always read the secrets of his very heart. But may be all boys think their own mother noblest and finest. With Wesley, however, there was ample foundation for the reverence of his ripening, thoughtful spirit, for Rachel Sanford was a noble woman.

And this woman, with her wide experience, her culture, her reading of many books, her communion with

the leaders of their order, her knowledge of the Bible, which was almost all written upon her heart,—this woman believed in the Word, and revered it! And he had called it a lie in her presence! For a while Wesley Sanford felt smaller than a flake of snow, and his heart was colder than the drifts over which he walked. Lifting his head a little from the bent posture which he had steadily kept, over he knew not how wide a stretch of distance, a great light, not quite “round and full,” came surging above the tree-skirted horizon. Shafts of silver shot out over the snow; they touched his hurrying feet; they smote his cold garments; they pointed out the barns of the farmers, and set the chimneys of their primitive houses in clear lines against the blue ether. A little higher, and he took in the whole sweep of the heavens. Snow and barns and chimneys, and the brown of his old coat had disappeared. The moon climbed up a heaven full of stars. He took them in with his eyes; he reached out his yearning heart and embraced them. They seemed very near to God,—little windows in his “house not made with hands.” “How beautiful! how grand!” he exclaimed. “And God made every one of the stars, and the moon, too; he made me; but he did not make hell, and I am not totally depraved. The Bible *is* a lie! And my mother! my mother, with her wisdom, can’t look into heaven and say she believes it!”

Then walking slowly, and still looking up; clinging with the tenacity of a drowning man to the thought of God, as his name is written on the stars, he cried for help in his weakness, and a light to shine into the

recesses of the hidden dark. There was hope, as he read these symbols of power and watch-care, but peace did not come with her soft mantle, nor did the cold leave his heart.

Some sudden thought arrested him after this prayer for light, and he quickly turned and retraced his way. He walked on somewhat more conscious of his path than before. Looking on either side, the moon-lit fields were strange. He had certainly wandered beyond his own neighborhood. The sparse dwellings along the way showed no light in their windows. He had been oblivious of time, but evidently the world slept, and the stars alone were awake. Hurrying a little, as he realized the lateness of the hour, he saw, from the brow of the hill he had just climbed, a bright light shining from windows in the valley but a little way off. He descended the hill, his eyes upon the signal-light. Some watcher by a sick-bed, he thought, at first. Then he remembered that the light by sick-beds is left to burn low. But he soon reached the spot, and through the uncurtained windows saw a score of men sitting with eager faces, while one stood talking earnestly. It was a little country school-house, and he opened the door and went softly in. His entrance was unnoticed, the listeners were so rapt, and the speaker so intensely earnest. Something fell upon his ear which at once enchanted him.

"If the salvation of all men is God's will, my friends," said the speaker, "and we have just read in this Holy Book that it is, there is no power in the universe of his creation which can thwart his will. That is sovereign, for he is God over all." "Read it

again," cried a voice. The listeners were wrought to the highest pitch of excited interest. The speaker bent his head, and read in clear, measured tones: "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God, our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus: who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."

Wesley Sanford rose from the seat into which he had noiselessly slipped, and going into the desk, stood by the preacher's side, and looked upon the page.

"Where is that? Show it to me." All eyes were turned upon him, as he followed the direction of the speaker to the exact spot on the page where these wondrous words were writ. He looked upon them, bending his head until his eyes almost touched the leaves of the Bible. He read them slowly, in a half whisper. Then he read them again aloud, apparently unconscious of the place or any human presence, for Wesley was but a timid boy. Then he looked over the two pages; then turned others, to assure himself if it were really the Bible. There was no mistake; it was like the one on the swinging shelf at home, but he never saw nor heard those words before. He sat down upon the seat behind the preacher. "Go on," he whispered, hoarsely. The preacher said, "It is late, brethren; we will now be dismissed. Next Wednesday evening, if it be God's will, I will speak to you again."

The score of men arose and received the benediction. As they filed out, most of them stopping to

Wesley looked into their faces, and saw none that he knew. Then he aroused himself enough to ask where he was, and was surprised to find that the sweep of his thought had borne him more than six miles from home.

The preacher looked kindly upon this boy, with his high head and face of thought, and asked him to come next time and hear him. But Wesley needed no invitation. He followed the others to the snowy street, and walked fast homeward. One of the men asked where he lived, and heard a mutter of something about "Sanford's," and the "Susquehanna," as the swift pace of Wesley separated them, but that was not intelligible to him. No matter. Very likely the boy would come again.

New and strange thoughts lent strength to the return of this wanderer. He seemed to see before him continually the light in the school-house windows, and be hurrying on to reach it. Somebody believed the Bible taught a different doctrine from that in which he had been educated. He was impatient to know more about it. Wednesday night seemed very far off. But the gleam of light in those little verses the preacher read was before his soul like a steady lamp, and he walked on. Somehow, the stars shone fairer than before, and there was a mingling of his new soul-lamp with their beams. He thought, and looked upward, and out of sight, with the eyes in his face, and the eyes of his soul, and the light in heaven and the new gleam from the Bible seemed one, and from one source. O, if revelation could speak the kindly language of nature, then Wesley Sanford thought he

should find peace. But millions believed that it was the medium of God's purpose to inflict a doom upon sinners which could never be reconciled with the character of a provident father; and here, on the other side, were the strange preacher, and but a handful to hear him! Well!

The old clock on the mantel struck two as Wesley crept noiselessly in, and climbed the stairs to his own room. Charles slept, and did not waken at the touch of his icy fingers. He lay still and closed his eyes, but sleep came not to him; and when he thought he was the first up in the morning, he was surprised to find his mother sitting in the arm-chair, in the attitude in which he had last seen her, save that her head had been thrown back from its reverent posture against the supporting chair. The fire was in embers, and the room was cold. He touched the forehead of his mother; it, too, felt cold, but she started at his touch as from a troubled sleep.

"Where has my boy been this long, cold night?" she said.

"A part of the time in his bed, dear mother."

"I have watched all night for you, Wesley. I don't think I have slept at all until just now."

"You must have slept; I came in at two."

"Where were you, child?"

"Walking—walking and thinking; don't ask me any more, mother."

There was pleading in his tone, and the look of last night had left his face. It was softer, and the mother thought she saw traces of trust and rest, after the agony of doubt; so she helped about the fire, and

talked of other things, and when Loudon and Charles came in to breakfast all was as before, and no word of reproof was spoken to Wesley. But he did not see the earnest and pleading attitude of his mother, nor hear her tones, though the door was more than ajar. He was reading; and not of pre-Adamite mysteries.

CHAPTER II.

DIFFERING GROWTHS IN LIFE'S GARDEN.

AFTER breakfast, which was eaten almost in silence, Wesley and Charles split wood a while, and then went to school. Charles was full of talk about "big sums" which he had to do, and doubts of the "master's" ability to help him, to which Wesley nodded in an abstracted way, and said nothing. Charles learned easily and fast. He had a clear head, and applied himself closely to study. He was much the better scholar, though the younger boy. Books opened to him their mysteries readily, and for the past winter or two he had tested the skill of the "master" somewhat severely. Now he had a larger arithmetic, and felt very doubtful about being helped through it.

"But I shan't be balked, Wesley," he rattled on, "if Stokes can't help me. I've found out a secret. John Irons knows everything—everything, I say; more than all the 'masters,' put together, that we ever went to. I have told him I shall get Stokes up a stump in a week or two more,—just let me get over a few more leaves, and I know he can't do the sums. Pike's is awful hard,—but John Irons says he'll help me nights if I'll come down there, and I'm going to chop wood for him. This cold weather pinches the

poor old man all up to go out doors. Why, Wesley, he's college bred; and nobody seems to know it round here. They don't look up to him any. For my part, I think education is all there is worth having. The man that knows the most is the one to look up to. John Irons is king of this whole region, *I* think. Cooper himself don't know half as much, if he does write books. Did you know it, Wesley?"

Wesley, thus appealed to, found his voice.

"Yes, Charles, I have heard him talk, and knew he was wiser than the other neighbors, but I did not know how wise. I am glad he can help you. He knows all about arithmetic, does he?"

"Why, he's been through Pike's a hundred times, I guess. And he knows Latin; and I'm going to study Latin, too. 'Tis education forms the common mind.'"

Just here the school-house door shut garrulous Charley's talk, and as the two went in, Wesley looked about among the boys in a dreamy, abstracted way, and wondered if education is all one needs. If it is, he thought, it is not that education for which we depend upon "masters," but that which we gain by our own implements of thought and exploration. He was thinking that, perhaps, had he read the Bible for himself, instead of depending upon masters, some of the agony of the past would never have come to his young life.

Charles went to his books with high spirits, and before night gained the expected triumph. He "balked" the master. Then he left school with a great flourish, and it went all over the neighborhood that "Charles Sanford knew more than Master Stokes."

Wesley stumbled among the figures which seemed so many meaningless shapes to him, while in his heart he kept singing the verses he heard and read in the school-house so far off, the night before, and which he had assured himself were real, and no dream, before he tasted breakfast that morning. He kept thinking about the doctrines of the church, and wondering if, indeed, the Bible can be interpreted to harmonize with nature; and if, on its pages there were other verses akin to the ones which had set a star in the night of his meditations. So he thought, and dreamed, and stumbled in his recitations, and Master Stokes felt consoled over the defeat he had experienced with Charles, by the dulness of Wesley, who was the elder, and smart, as everybody allowed. Charles was uncommon, and it was no disgrace to be balked by a genius. This was the argument the "master" took up, when the little incident of the day was rehearsed before a blazing fire, at the patron's where he boarded that week.

When the school was dismissed for the night, and the noisy, rollicking children rushed out, and ran, and danced, and laughed, on their way homeward, Wesley lagged behind. The noise hurt him. He wanted to think undisturbed. The snow-white fields were not entrancing to him just then, neither were the bright-eyed and rosy young men and maidens.

He did not hear the pair of little feet crushing the snow just behind him. But they pattered on all the same, keeping close in the track of the big boy, while the face they carried looked very sober under its little close hood. It kept growing more and more sober,

till by-and-by the tears started and trickled over the cherry cheeks. Wesley had carried Mercy Ryder's dinner-basket home from school every night for three or four winters past. She was such a little mite he thought the strong ought to help her, and he was strong. Sometimes, when the winds had drifted the snow, he carried her through the drifts. She had no brother, and Wesley was kind enough to take a brother's place. Then Mercy was quiet, and did not rattle on and disturb him as Charles did; so he got rid of Charles by helping the little girl, for Charles thought it very silly to pay much attention to girls. He liked better to do big sums, and talk about the future of a scholar, such as John Irons was, and he meant to be.

By-and-by Mercy could bear this indifference of Wesley no longer; so she slipped a little hand into his, and looked up in his absorbed face as though she would ask the reason of this change. But something in the face awed her, and she did not speak. Wesley looked as though he was thinking thoughts too profound for her to understand, should she ask about them. But the touch of the slender fingers, and the appealing, tearful face, called him from the realm out of sight, and he reached out and took her basket with the other hand, leading still the child. Mercy dried her tears, for there was the same kindness in the act as before, and she thought, perhaps he was thinking, and did not know she was so near. They talked about the day, and Charles's success, but Wesley did not realize that he had blundered more than usual in his lessons, though Mercy expected he would speak about

it, and tell her why. And soon they reached Horace Ryder's gate, and Wesley went on alone, deep as ever in the old thoughts.

Horace Ryder was nearest neighbor on one side of Loudon Sanford. He owned more acres than the small farmer,—had inherited them from his father before him, who bought and improved the land. He had just finished a house, which was larger and finer than any about. There was a hall in it; *that* was different from the primitive houses, and they had a parlor with a bright-striped carpet, the wonder and admiration of all the neighborhood. Eunice, his wife, was a woman who took great pride in personal appearance, and wore the latest fashion herself, and provided the latest for Mercy. She plumed herself a good deal on the new house and bright carpet and many inherited acres, but for all that she was thought a clever woman, though nothing at all like Rachel Sanford. She had a smile ready for everybody, and though some asserted that she was a scold in private, and talked about those she smiled upon, Rachel credited the smile, and they got along pleasantly together. They were members of the same church, and sat together; that is, the women did. In those days men and women of the Methodist church took different sides of the house. Families came to the meeting-house door together, and then divided off; the father led his boys up one aisle to a seat with him, and the mother took care of the girls. I believe that is mostly done away with now; I know it is in cities. I know, too, that families sit together in the church which has been reared on the site of the one where the Sanfords

and Ryders once sat, and I, who sometimes drop in for variety, like it better.

Horace Ryder, I may as well tell you now, was class leader. Whether he was put in that office because he had a new house and bright carpet, I don't know; but it happened soon after the advent of these comforts; and then the ministers stopped less frequently at Sanford's and went to Ryder's; save the particular few who were charmed with the wisdom of Rachel, and loved to sit at her table as guests, and at her feet as learners. Ryder was a conceited man; sleek outside, like his wife. If he had anything against a neighbor it was not his fashion to go to him and settle the difference, but he smiled on the neighbor, and scolded to others about him, spreading abroad his real or imaginary fault, and the first thing the neighbor would know of his ill-feeling, he would hear of it in some round-about way. Then, if he were an honest man, bent on reconciliation, and went straight to headquarters with the matter, Ryder smiled, and squirmed, and quibbled, and, if possible, made him think it all gossip which the wind had blown. And so he had no quarrels with those about him, but some real outspoken folk called him a snake in the grass.

Horace Ryder loved money. He thought those who possessed it were on a higher round of the social ladder. So he courted such, and tried to get them on terms of intimacy at his house. Unfortunately, the neighborhood was about on an equal footing as to wealth, when himself was counted out. But over the river there were some families who visited Cooper, and had halls in their houses, and a striped carpet. After

When he was gone Wesley asked his mother to sit down with him and he would explain more fully the grounds of his faith, and as he did so, point by point, if she could successfully controvert it, using the Bible and reason for her weapons, he would renounce it altogether; but if she could not, he thought he ought to be allowed to go to the Chapel school-house when he liked, and enjoy his religion in peace,—be king of the realm out of sight without hostile interference.

To this proposition Rachel Sanford readily acceded, and the argument began. It continued all day without even the ordinary interruption of dinner. Loudon whose “chores” did not long occupy his attention, and who shivered in the entry a good part of the forenoon listening to the talk,—he was too proud to be *seen* listening,—stepped into the closet and ate his dinner off the shelves. Then he sat down on the candle-box and stayed there; it was warmer than in the entry.

The mother and son thought not of dinner. They were unconscious of the flight of time. They were lost,—he in the glory and excellence of a universal Father’s love and plan,—she in wonder at the marvellous knowledge and rapt reverence of her boy; and in trying to make a respectable argument in defence of her partial faith. The supper hour came; but by this time Loudon himself was too much absorbed to nibble. He was full of something which precluded the possibility of hunger, and every little while he made an effort to swallow, and stretched up his neck unconsciously. Wesley’s arguments were marvellous, and Rachel, who knew more than the ministers, seemed but a poor match for him.

of differences in outward appearance, nor so easily caught by the conventionalities of society. A child never refuses to play with another who wears patched clothes, until it has been taught thus by some artificial papa or mamma at home. When these simple and native instincts are driven out, the "kingdom of heaven" goes with them; and the child taught to assume the stilts of a false estimate of social life, can no longer be blessed truly with the divine and everlasting words, nor feel Christ's hand upon its head in the old benediction. The "kingdom of heaven" is not "of such" as the child becomes who has been taught not to play with the poor widow's daughter.

After awhile Widow Rice noticed the absence of the little sunbeam Mercy Ryder always brought into the house, and going to her father's one evening with the new jacket she had stitched so nicely for the class-leader, she spoke about it in presence of all the family.

"We have missed you, Mercy. Why have you not been to see Susan?"

Before Mercy could think how to answer, for truth and a fear of wounding the sensitive woman were wrestling in her heart, Horace, the class-leader, found a way plausible as honey, out of the knot.

"Mercy is very much taken up with her books, and don't go anywhere. She is studying—what is it, Mercy?"

"Grammar, father."

"She is studying grammar, and it takes all the time between school to find the places on the map. I am real afraid our child will hurt herself, plying her lessons so hard."

Mrs. Rice, with a rippling smile she could hardly hide, told Mercy she should not confine herself too closely, but romp in the open air as usual, and come to her little room and study with Susan, it would brighten up the evenings wonderfully if she would; and, she added, "if you find any trouble parsing, I will help you; I help Susan."

"Do tell, Sister Rice, if you ever studied grammar?" inquired Eunice Ryder.

"Yes. I was a teacher before my marriage, and have not only studied, but taught it."

"Well, I make no doubt you can help Mercy; but then you have so much to do, it will be taking your time."

"Not at all. I can sew, and instruct them at the same time."

"I don't think you could sew much if you had such a task at hunting for places and things as our Mercy does."

"That is geography, father."

"O, well, I knowed you hunted a sight after something."

Widow Rice rose to go, and told Mercy again that Susan missed her, and she must diversify her studies by a walk, and a comparison of notes with her little girl.

After she went away there was an uncomfortable feeling in the best house in the neighborhood, and the class-leader went immediately to prayers, to allay it if possible. But Mercy's eyes met his as he rose from his knees, and seemed to say, "not all the truth, father. You did not tell Widow Rice all the truth."

His eyes fell under the innocent look, and he slipped into his bedroom early for him that night, muttering something about a headache.

"I guess we shall have to let you go with Susan, Mercy. Her mother belongs to our church, and she will always be asking us why, if you don't, and then we don't want to offend her. She did not ask half as much for making this jacket as a tailor would, and your father has more clothes to make this winter. Maybe she won't happen here when any of Isadore's neighbors are with us ; and if she should, we can say she sews for us, you know, and that would excuse it."

And Mercy, too glad of the liberty to visit Susan again, ran off to bed, without weighing or measuring very closely her mother's calculating words.

CHAPTER III.

WESLEY SANFORD FINDS THE TREE OF LIFE.

WHEN Loudon Sanford wanted to read and pray next time, he went to the swinging-shelf beside the chimney, and the Bible was not there. He turned and looked over the room. Sometimes Rachel read it silently of a whole evening, but Rachel was knitting. Charles had just bustled in, and told how John Irons did the sums "quicker than a wink" that had balked the master. He had not said all he wanted to about this wise old man, when his father began to prepare for the evening devotions. But they had waited a little for his return, and it was bedtime now in this punctual house. So Charles lowered his tone, and told his mother he should study Latin, too,—he could borrow the books of John Irons.

Wesley, as usual, sat by the table, holding his big head with one hand, while with the other he clasped and turned the leaves of a book over which he was as utterly lost as on the previous night among pre-Adamite mysteries. The face of the old man darkened as he saw no movement to lay it aside, and remembered the awful shock of the night before. Then, as no vision of the Bible came to him from any nook of the little room his eye was searching over, the

thought struck him that Wesley had destroyed it. For a moment he kept silence; the emotions which swept him were too terrible for any voice. Then, seating himself in the customary place, he said, sharply, "Wesley!" The boy looked towards him. "What have you done with the Bible? It is not to be found, and none but you would dare make way with it."

A smile crept over the face of Rachel at these sharp words. All the evening she had sat very calm, rapt in a sweet peace, ever and anon her deep eyes lifting from the stocking-heel she was knitting, to the noble figure of her first-born. And as Wesley rises from his seat and approaches his father, bearing the book he had been reading, and lays it in the arms of the old man, instead of the swinging-shelf beside the chimney, the white kerchief across the mother's bosom rises and falls with a joy great as that which thrilled her when she first heard the wail of a child of her own.

Loudon looks abashed, and amazed, too, as he takes the Bible from Wesley's hand, and wonders what has come across the boy, to set him reading a whole evening the very pages he had openly spurned the night before. But he says nothing, though it was a long time before his nervous fingers ceased fumbling among the leaves, and rested at last upon the open page of the lesson. He did not look up to see whether the boys were sitting in reverent posture, but hurried on with the reading, a tremor in his voice all the while, and a little choking effort over the word "father." Whether some angel directed his nervous fingers I know not, but that night Loudon Sanford read the "Parable of the Prodigal Son." Rachel listened, and

thought of her own boy returning from his madness, and her heart yearned to make great demonstrations of joy over it. If she had possessed them, the ring and the new robe would have adorned Wesley as soon as the prayer was over and she could bring them, and they four would have sat down to a feast upon the fatted calf. As it was, she saw with her inner eyes the returned boy arrayed in king's garments, and in the realm out of sight she ate meat which the world knows not of.

Wesley listened but thought not of himself, or *his* home, or *his* father. To him the "Father" in the parable personated the good God, and the ragged and hungry boy a great world-full of men and women, starving on the husks of creeds out of which the sweet kernel of divine love had been mercilessly shaken by the unskilful hands of the priests. He saw how, like portions of one perfect whole, this "love" of the father, and his "will" to make it manifest, harmonized and blended, and the light in the school-house windows grew brighter and warmer, too. When the family slipped off to bed, without speaking he took again the Bible, and hunted for what the old man read, and read and re-read it, taking in its wealth and beauty, and gathering its lesson of trust. Then he, too, slept, sweetly as the child sleeps, before its questions begin to seek answers from the world of mystery out of sight.

From that time onward, every night, when the hour for prayer came round at Sanford's on the Susquehanna, a boy fast reaching manhood closed the pages of the Word over which he had leaned intently for

hours, and laid the volume in his father's lap. And the peace of Rachel grew deeper, and seemed secure, save now and then when Wesley was absent until midnight, and she knew not where; and when she questioned him, he begged her not to ask him. This disturbed her, but not greatly, for her child was dutiful and thoughtful, and she had no suspicion that he frequented wicked places. And Rachel was right. Dear, anxious mothers, if your boy reads all the evening, six days out of seven, and, when prayers are said at your home-altar, the priest must take the Bible from the young man's hand, and bring him to consciousness by asking for it, don't imagine he frequents evil places on that one night of absence. You will never find such a one in a rum-shop, or with fast men around the gambler's board. Rest your souls by thinking he is with his "kindred," and if you should desire to be certainly satisfied, and hunt among them for the boy, you will very likely find him disputing in the Temple with the Doctors, and as surely seeking after light when your eyes are not upon him as when he sits in the blaze of the kitchen fire, and reads the Divine Word.

When Wesley Sanford was not in the family circle, he was in a little wider circle, some six miles from home. The roof of a school-house sheltered him. Tallow candles, in bright brass candlesticks, gave light to all within the house,—that light which enabled them to see each other, and the roof, and walls, and benches of the house. But that light was of little account to Wesley, save as it helped him to see the face of the preacher, as great thoughts sent such radi-

ance over it. The light he sought came from the Word, as expounded reasonably and justly by the preacher. It went deeper than the outer shell of the house, and more than helped show them the look of each other's faces. It lit the dark realm of doubt, and one after another dissipated the spectres which haunted the inner court of the temple.

The preacher was very patient with his listeners, and the meetings were often prolonged till midnight, so many were the questions they wanted him to answer. But the men who formed his audience were oblivious of the hands on the dial. They wanted most to know what hand measured out the moments of time, whether that of a father or an inexorable judge, and whence all these earthly years are tending, — whether upward and onward, in obedience to a divine plan, or in divided lines, according as we stumble or walk erect and safely. They were men who had heard in every clock-tick for long years the doom of innumerable souls, some of them children of their own loins, and they would know whether this haunting shadow were reflected from the Christian revelation or pagan mythology. With the earnest desire of suffering souls they questioned and listened, forgetful whether, in the world of sense, it were midnight or morning. They were trying to dispel the midnight of false isms, and usher in the morning light of faith and trust. And already in each soul was the dawn appearing of that true and everlasting light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day, and they rejoiced in its prophecy, gathering at each meeting more and more rays to illumine the realm out of sight.

Gradually new faces came in, and before the summer heats melted the snow, some of the men brought their wives; and then others encouraged by a bolder neighbor's step, did the same, until there were as many women as men at the meetings, and they seemed as much absorbed as their husbands.

So Wesley Sanford studied the Bible and listened to the preacher until every doubt was removed, and he read in full, round letters on the page of revelation the same dear name that nature before had taught him, and the two voices were one henceforth. All this time he had kept silent about the change which was gradually coming to him, thinking he would know for himself, and be thoroughly convinced before he spoke to his parents about the new faith. When he did speak, he desired to be able to do more than ask questions upsetting their ism, as he had formerly done. He would build the new house in its beauty, and he made no doubt his mother, at any rate, would leave the old and enter into the rest of the new. About his father he felt some doubt. He was settled firmly, and would not see anything but rock in the foundation, even if his own child should point out the sand. Then he was a man who had great faith in tradition and priestly authority. He did not like to be disturbed, either, and when he accepted a doctrine it became a part of himself, in a sense. He would very likely fret, and call the boy an infidel, and not half listen to his arguments; so Wesley thought, and it delayed a little the talk he so much desired to have. Everything had been so smooth for a year back, he hesitated about rudely breaking the peace. He had planted and hoed

the corn briskly and cheerfully, and stopped the old habit of leaning over the hoe. Loudon thought him a profitable hand now, even better than Charles, who was so full of sums, and Latin, and wise John Irons, that he ciphered on the fence-rails, and wrote words of the strange language over the picket gate, and on the beams and doors of the barn. He mumbled, too, besides, and Loudon, who could not understand him, sometimes called him crazy, and charged him to hurry up with his work, pointing to "steady Wesley" as an example.

Wesley did not covet his brother's knowledge, but often he wished he could interest him in his own study, which he thought profounder. But when he saw his whole soul swallowed up in books, he forbore to change the current, and never once asked him to go to the school-house with light in its windows, nor told him about it at all, though Charles rallied him about going to see the girls, and fully believed he did, and that was why he kept so still about his place of resort.

But hidden things come to light in some way at last, and often before we are ready for their revelation, be it ever so honorable to ourselves. Six miles is a very little way, in one sense, and sometimes circumstances may make it shorter than it really is. Isadore Smith's residence happened to be not very far from the school-house with light in its windows, and Isadore came home to her father's very often, and told all the neighborhood news, even to reports about the probable subject of Cooper's new book, whether Mohicans, or a real love story. Isadore had a neighbor, a real

born aristocrat, and she was the very first woman to break the ice, and go with her husband to the little school-house. She was an observing woman, and had profound reverence for an intellectual head. She could listen to the preacher, and read the people, too; and it chanced that Wesley Sanford came in for the largest share of this reading. The first time her eyes fell on him, she knew she had seen an uncommon youth. So she watched him as he took in the sermon in great gulps, as though choked with a long thirst. She read his face, thoughtful and serious above his years, and wondered where he was born, and of what parents. She asked her husband. He did not know. She asked some of the neighbors, describing him "almost six feet tall, and such a head on his shoulders! and auburn hair, and deep, liquid eyes;" but the neighbors did not know him, till she painted the picture for Isadore Ryder Smith, who saw the original Wesley Sanford in it, though it never occurred to her to invest him with such a halo, or speak of him with so great enthusiasm. It is all in the eyes that look upon us, you see, whether we are fair and fine, or coarse and forbidding. The eyes of an intellectual person can see where intellect has made his throne in others; the eyes of love are good and tender readers, too, generally seeing everything glorious, whether it is or is not; but beauty is jealous, and money-lovers see the coat rather than "almost six feet" of graceful stature, and the hat sooner than auburn hair or a head uncommonly large.

And so it happened that Isadore, knowing Wesley for the son of a small farmer, saw that, and nothing more; and when she found it was really he whom her

neighbor described, she tried to put a damper on her enthusiasm by telling just who and what he was; that is, that he was the son of Loudon Sanford, a small farmer, in whose house was no hall, and on whose floor was not a sign of a striped carpet.

After her neighbor had left her, she reflected a minute upon the subject of their interview, and felt that she had found out a secret. Then she went straight to the barn, where her husband was talking very glibly about the merits of a particular horse which he wanted to trade off, and asked him to "harness up" for her right away; she wanted to go to father's.

"Anybody sick?" said jockey John.

"No; but I want very much to see our folks."

The horse which Isadore was in the habit of driving did not happen to be the one under discussion, so her husband "harnessed up" for her, and she whipped off to father's at an unusually rapid pace, while John plied his man with fine stories until he had accomplished a trade which put a clean forty dollars in his own pocket. Then he felt comfortable enough to smile over his cup of tea, and eat hot biscuit with a relish, though nobody but the hired-girl graced the evening board.

Now, I suppose I must explain about the secret. Isadore Ryder Smith was not blind to the fact of Wesley Sanford's kindness to her sister Mercy, and for a long time it had agitated her even spirits more than was pleasant. She was determined that it should be stopped. When Mercy settled in life she must occupy a round of the social ladder next her own, and Wesley had not money enough nor land enough to procure such exalted distinction. But there were neighbors

of hers who had. There was Dennis Canfield, a bachelor of thirty-six, whose father was dead, and his mother was "poorly," and he would be sole heir to a large farm. He would make a fine match for Mercy.

The fact that Wesley was the son of a small farmer might not have much weight in honest little Mercy's heart, but to know that he frequented infidel meetings would no doubt make an unfavorable impression upon her; and this is the secret which Isadore carried to Horace Ryder and Eunice his wife, and their child Mercy.

CHAPTER IV.

CONTROVERSY, ENDING IN PEACE.

HORACE RYDER, the class-leader, put on his overcoat, and, of course, the new jacket stitched so nicely by Widow Rice was under it; that was his Sunday jacket, but this was not Sunday that I am speaking of, but the evening of the day of Child Isadore's visits. He went out of the house by way of the hall-door. He opened and shut, punctiliously, the front gate, then he turned towards the west, and walked somewhat slowly. But the end of his little journey would come before he wanted it to; and there, sure enough, was the small house of neighbor Sanford, and the small gate guarding it. With a little uneasy flurry about him, he kicked the gate, and it flew open and then shut of itself behind him, while he crept towards the door. He stood a minute on the door-stone in an undecided way, and if he had not feared his step was already heard he would then have turned back. It required more bravery than he was in the habit of showing, or, in fact, was able to show without urging, to do the errand which had driven him to the unfamiliar ground — or rather door-stone — where he stood. But not desiring detection as an eavesdropper, he rapped, and Rachel Sanford opened the door and he went in.

Fortunately, the coast was clear, and the presence he dreaded did not sit at the hearth. Wesley was away in the little school-house; Charles, too, was away; that was well. John Irons was hearing Latin lessons, and, by way of variety, showing his student how to do sums farther on, and in bigger books than Pike's.

The Sanfords were glad to see their neighbor, the class-leader, and Rachel, who knew how to fill the place of mistress in a house much larger than the one she then occupied, and had done it for a good many years, too, led in the talk, and tried to make their caller at his ease. But Ryder did not enter with any zest into the conversation. Even the prosperity of the church, and the new ministers on their circuit, failed to draw from him any hearty response. The talk seemed all to fall upon Rachel; but this she could have endured for a little time had there been any evidence of interest in her listener. As it was she began to grow apprehensive and embarrassed, and the current of her ready speech lagged, and then stopped altogether. Horace Ryder's face perceptibly lengthened, and he made an effort to speak, but coughed a little and waited. Then he looked straight into the fire, and after a minute, in which there was an audible sigh, he tried again to speak. Rachel saw his hesitancy, and though she by this time fully believed he had come as the bearer of evil tidings, she came to the rescue, and helped this sleek man to unbosom his weighty secret.

"What is it, Brother Ryder? You have bad news for us."

Now Ryder had a sister in the city where Loudon Sanford once sold silks and broadcloths, and watched his returning ships, and Rachel was thinking he had heard through her of death among their kindred, and her heart was very big and heavy behind her inquiring words.

"Yes, Sister Sanford! bad news! bad news!"

"Tell us, brother! Suspense is worse than reality."

"Where is Wesley?"

The mother started as though a thunderbolt had shocked her. Death must come to kindred, and to us; and the pain its presence brings has some alleviation in the fact of inevitability; some in hope. But this question of Horace Ryder aroused suspicion that there might be the shadow of death in life, and that is most terrible to bear.

Rachel gasped the answer,— "He is out for the evening; we know not where."

"Ah! he's been in the way of going out nights, has he?"

"Once in a while he is absent of an evening; some times as often as once a week."

"And you haven't found out where? I'm very sorry for ye, Brother and Sister Sanford."

"Wesley is such a serious and quiet boy we have not urged him to tell, as he seemed to be unwilling. We have always felt to trust him; but tell us, Brother Ryder, we will try to bear it."

"You heard our minister warn us against the infidel meetings in the Chapel school-house? There's where Wesley goes!"

Loudon Sanford looked at his wife, and there was

more anger and reproach than pain in his look. She felt it, knowing its meaning. She had expostulated with her husband about being severe with Wesley for his denial of the Bible. He had determined to make an example of him, and get all the ministers to help in the rescue. But Rachel's pleading hindered him from freeing his own mind, and the after-bearing of Wesley made him silent to the ministers. Now his look seemed to say "If I had nipped this in the bud, as I wanted to, such a disgrace would never have come to my old heart!"

"But, Loudon," said Rachel, "Wesley reads the Bible every night, and is steady and circumspect."

"These infidels pretend to read the Bible, they say, Sister Sanford, but they try all manner of ways to make it meet their notions. You know what our minister said about them. They don't believe in any punishment for the wicked, but say everybody is going to heaven just as they are."

"It is a snare of the devil," said Loudon; "and to think my boy should fall into it when I might have hindered him!"

"But it is not so bad as I feared from Brother Ryder's looks before he said anything, Loudon."

"What could be worse, wife?"

"I think it would be worse to hear that Wesley gambled or got drunk, father."

"I make no doubt they do gamble and get drunk, too; infidels do everything wicked!"

"Wesley has no marks of evil habits; and I know he has none."

"But his soul, Sister Sanford, his soul is lost if he

goes to infidel meetings, and he might as well take his fill of sin."

"We will investigate the matter, Brother Ryder, and we thank you for telling us," said Rachel; and Ryder rose to go. "I hope it may not be so bad; Wesley is very thoughtful, and I think will explain everything, and, Brother Ryder, he reads the Bible daily; I can't think him lost while he does that."

"Brother Ryder" went home feeling that he had not raised so big a breeze as he intended to. Sanford was evidently a good deal disturbed, but his wife took the matter calmly enough for a sinner, and he had reckoned her a saint. He could not read human nature very well. Had he been able to, he would have seen that the apprehensions his long visage and deep sighs aroused were so much more terrible than his revelation that the relief Rachel Sanford felt was like the springing up of a bent sapling. Now, perhaps, you will not understand my figure unless you have sometimes played in the woods and made a horse of a tender young tree. If you have, you will doubtless remember with what an elastic spring the tree straightened when you leaped off. And so it was when Rachel's fear that Wesley went astray, and was bent by evil habit, leaped off her heart at the class-leader's exact statement. A meeting, she thought, could not be so very bad, even if it were called infidel. She had but one idea of a meeting, and that embraced sermons and hymns and prayers.

When Horace Ryder told his wife Eunice about the call, they had a conference over the lack of indignant demonstration on the part of the apostate's parents, and

concluded they were cool, and tried to smooth the matter because they had it in their heads to become connected with the best house in the neighborhood through this very apostate ; and then and there they laid their plans to break it up should anything serious promise to come from this school-boy attention. The course they took to compass their ends was to speak evil of Wesley Sanford every time they could by any hook or crook drag him into the home talk. All they said was especially intended for the ear of Mercy, and she generally heard it, no matter how intent over her lessons. They had two horns to the evil beast they were trying by slanderous tongues to manufacture ; one was infidelity, the other poor prospects — in other words, poverty. When they goaded with the poverty horn Mercy could find the places on the map about as well. She knew Wesley was in good health, and strong and smart, and all the world lay before him. He could certainly make the way for himself, and for her, too, if he should want her to go with him. Many times he had picked her up in his arms and carried her through the drifts ; and she knew he could do it again. But when Horace and Eunice both grasped the infidel horn and brandished it about in their artful way, Mercy was afraid. Europe and Africa ran together on the map, and she could not tell the difference between personal and relative pronouns. She generally looked into her books very intently, and trembled all to herself. This infidelity touched the world out of sight, which all of us, with our vein of mystery, reverence more than we to places we can point out with a finger, or visit by carriage or ship ; and Mercy thought it a terrible thing to

be an infidel, though she did not know just what it was. The winter school was done, so she could not ask Wesley what it meant, and besides, he had told her it was his last winter ; he was going to do something else. She thought she should go yet for some time, and she should miss Wesley : but he had made her ashamed that winter by picking her up and carrying her through the drifts. She was beginning to creep out of little-girlhood, and did not like to be treated as though she were a baby. And so she thought if he was always going to carry her or lead her, perhaps they had better not go to the same school any more.

Mercy had a habit of carrying her father a bottle of home-brewed beer, or a mug of milk when he was out on the farm, and sometimes she would loiter about the fields hunting for spring flowers, or later for strawberries. Now this idea of infidel was kept so constantly before her, by the almost daily talk of her parents, that she worried about it, and tried to lay some plan of asking Wesley what it meant. She was not old enough, or bold enough, to run up to Sanford's at twilight and tempt Wesley to a walk home with her, and thus gain the coveted opportunity. So she watched till she saw him ploughing in the field adjoining theirs, and then taking a little slip of paper, and writing on it, "Father and mother say you are an infidel ; what is an infidel, Wesley ?" and, providing herself with a bottle of beer she went out to where her father ploughed and gave him the beer with a pleasant word, and then hunted for early blossoms. She found some little blue violets, and an occasional wood-anemone for variety, and tying them together with a bit torn from the string

of her sunbonnet, and tying in the slip of paper, too, she watched and loitered till Wesley came round on the nearest furrow, and then tossing the sweet little budget with its voice of bloom, which she did not understand any better than she did what an infidel is, over the fence, she blushed very red, and hurried home, feeling that she had done a very striking thing, and never once waited to see whether the young man picked up the flowers. But I tell you he did pick them up, and though they were just like hundreds of others he had covered with his furrow, he held them very tenderly in his brown hand, and was just going to hide them in the bosom of his vest when the slip of paper caught his eye. Reading it, he straightened up with a sign of the king in his gesture, and said, "Infidel, indeed! I wish Horace Ryder believed as much as I," and then he went on after the plough. But the thought that Mercy believed an infidel something terrible, and that he was one, troubled him, and he tried to plan some way of enlightening her. After a while he concluded to go right down to Horace Ryder's house and confront the class-leader to his face; and he would do it that very night when the day's work was over. He felt himself able to sustain an argument with the class-leader. He had passed an ordeal more trying than any that could come to him from Horace Ryder's logic, and in following this dignitary and his two horns I have neglected to tell you about it. But there is time enough, and this is as good a place as any.

When Loudon and Rachel found themselves alone after the revelation of Wesley's whereabouts, they talked the matter over, and concluded to forbid his

going to the Chapel school-house any more. At first they thought they would sit up until he came home, and have a reckoning with the boy that very night. But the thought of the late hour in which they usually heard his steps on the stair was a little discouraging, especially as they both felt tired, and, besides, a little prostrated by the strain imposed by their neighbor's call. And as Charles came in just then with news of the Academy about beginning, some three miles off, and an assertion that he should "surely go, if it were five miles instead of three," Loudon read and prayed, and then, as the current of their thought had been broken, they went to bed.

In the morning Wesley was greeted with a degree of gravity quite unusual in this dignified house; and when breakfast was over and he took his hat to go about some outdoor work, he was summoned to lay it aside and sit down. He did so with composure, half divining the occasion for the summons. He had been expecting his parents to find out where he went; in fact, hoping of late that they would, and open the way for explanation themselves. He was ready now. So when Loudon told him "Brother Ryder's" report, and asked him to give an account of himself, he was not disappointed, but gratified.

"An infidel, father? What does Mr. Ryder mean? An infidel does not believe the Bible; the minister I go to hear believes *that* much more devoutly than any other minister I ever heard preach. I *should* have been an infidel if he had not interpreted the Bible for me."

"Interpreted, boy! What do you mean by that?"

"Explained, father; harmonized one part with another, and all with the character of God as a father."

"And all punishment for sin explained away—*denied*, Wesley."

"No, far from it. On the contrary, Mr. Stacy teaches the certainty of punishment, and that there is no possible escape for the sinner except in ceasing to do evil and learning to do well."

"I heard Elder Marks' description of this new type of infidelity, and he said these people deny all punishment for sin, and he knows."

"He does not know if he says that. I have already heard over twenty sermons, and no point has been more emphatically stated than this—'That he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong that he hath done.'"

"Did you ever hear your minister say 'the wicked shall be turned into hell'?"

"Yes, I have heard him preach from that very text, and he says they *shall* be, father, and repentance cannot save them. So you see he believes more in the Bible than Elder Marks, who teaches that repentance changes the tenor of the passage, and softens the emphatic 'shall' to may. They may, or may not, be turned into hell, according as they do or do not repent."

"A gilded bait, boy, to catch the ungodly; and you have nibbled it until you are caught and lost, too, unless you turn!"

"Let us reason together, father. Please do not denounce a faith you are unacquainted with, except through Elder Marks' misrepresentation."

"Reason! yes, that is the talk of the infidel. No,

boy, you must repent and believe. Reason has nothing to do with the matter."

"I cannot believe an unreasonable doctrine, father. My reason must sanction it before faith can lay hold of it; and some of the tenets of your church seem to me altogether contrary to reason; but I used to think the Bible taught them, and that is why I once denied the Bible. But I see it differently now. Those passages which seem to favor these monstrous doctrines can be differently explained, and so made to harmonize with the love of God. And now, thank God, I believe."

"*What* do you believe? That is the important question."

Wesley rose, and walking across the room, for he had dropped into the nearest chair when summoned to this grand council, took the Bible from the swinging-shelf beside the chimney, and laying its open pages before him, read the articles of his faith. His views of God, and Christ, and man, and man's duty and destiny, were plainly stated in the language of Scripture. His parents listened while he read the Word, turning the pages familiarly as though it were all written on his heart, and when he ceased reading Rachel was silent, but Loudon called it an ingenious method of making out a case, and accused Wesley of garbling the inspired Book.

"I have read you its voice on these great themes, father, and I think Christ and the Apostles knew how to utter that voice, and I listen and believe. I wish the world believed, it would be better and happier than it is."

"Yes, I suppose the wicked would be happy, if somebody would take the fear of hell from before their eyes. But I tell you, boy, the Bible has not come down through the ages to be understood rightly the first time, by some obscure preacher."

"No, not for the first time. There have been devout men all through the past, who believed that God is a father, and that through the agency of Christ, his beloved son, the last wandering child shall be gathered home."

"That is all an invention of your preacher to make a heresy more plausible. There is no truth in it."

"It is historic, father, and you can read it for yourself if you will."

"The Bible is strong enough to stand alone, when you take it just as it reads, without your props and interpretations, and that is the way you must take it, and I forbid you going to that school-house any more, or following that preacher. He is the devil's emissary, and brought up as you have been, it is a shame to you to be caught in such a trap."

"I can stop following the preacher, I suppose, if my father orders it; but what I have gained in faith and peace no man taketh from me."

Loudon Sanford thought about the cattle at the barn, and was afraid Charles might give "Gray" a half-bushel instead of a peck of oats, if he did not look after the crazy youth. There was no reliance to be placed in him, he was so full of Algebra and Latin nonsense. So he took his hat and went out. He had entered his protest, and laid on the embargo of parental authority, and that was all he felt like trying to do with Wesley that morning.

When he was gone Wesley asked his mother to sit down with him and he would explain more fully the grounds of his faith, and as he did so, point by point, if she could successfully controvert it, using the Bible and reason for her weapons, he would renounce it altogether ; but if she could not, he thought he ought to be allowed to go to the Chapel school-house when he liked, and enjoy his religion in peace,—be king of the realm out of sight without hostile interference.

To this proposition Rachel Sanford readily acceded, and the argument began. It continued all day without even the ordinary interruption of dinner. Loudon whose “chores” did not long occupy his attention, and who shivered in the entry a good part of the forenoon listening to the talk,—he was too proud to be *seen* listening,—stepped into the closet and ate his dinner off the shelves. Then he sat down on the candle-box and stayed there ; it was warmer than in the entry.

The mother and son thought not of dinner. They were unconscious of the flight of time. They were lost,—he in the glory and excellence of a universal Father’s love and plan,—she in wonder at the marvellous knowledge and rapt reverence of her boy ; and in trying to make a respectable argument in defence of her partial faith. The supper hour came ; but by this time Loudon himself was too much absorbed to nibble. He was full of something which precluded the possibility of hunger, and every little while he made an effort to swallow, and stretched up his neck unconsciously. Wesley’s arguments were marvellous, and Rachel, who knew more than the ministers, seemed but a poor match for him.

Night gathered, and still there was the same unbroken and enthusiastic current rippling through the house. The door was ajar and a faint light streamed in ; otherwise Loudon was in the dark, though his seat was a candle-box. The old clock marked the hours one after another in wonderfully quick succession. What had got into the clock to go so fast ! Was it trying to keep pace with those two tongues ? It was long past bedtime, but Loudon as he listened felt as though he should never shut his eyes again, and that there was no such thing as sleep in the world. Where had he been journeying ? When midnight came and went, and at last the voices of the two were silent, he remembered starting out in the morning of creation, when "God saw everything he had made and pronounced it good," and floating on the current which swept wider and wider through the land of patriarchs and prophets, — through Palestine with its Christ, and miracle, and apostleship ; through all the nations and families and kindreds of the earth, until at last it was the "river of life," and palms bent over it, and Jesus who came as prophet of prophets and of the Highest too, led a redeemed universe along its banks, and God accepted the finished work, and there was a great shout of joy from "every creature in heaven and on the earth, and such as are in the sea."

"Infidel ! infidel !" muttered Loudon Sanford, "I must be careful how I use that word."

This is the ordeal through which Wesley passed, and after that he came and went at will, and none at home questioned his faith. But his parents, though awed at his wisdom, and stirred in their souls' deeps by the

sweet spirit of a Father's impartial love, made no outward sign, nor sought to become believers. They went on as before quietly; a little tender of the boy Wesley, for there was something about that long talk which was to them like inspiration.

CHAPTER V.

KNOWN BY THEIR FRUITS.

HORACE RYDER was very conscious that Wesley ploughed in the next lot. He was nervously so when he saw Mercy loiter about after giving him the beer. He watched her, though she never once suspected such a thing, and saw the bouquet fly over the fence. He was sure he saw something, and as Mercy had been creeping along the knolls with her head bent, he made no doubt she was picking the silly flowers, and on purpose to throw them to Wesley. He saw Wesley stop the horses and gather them up. He saw him stand a little while looking at them. He saw him put them in the bosom of his vest. And then he saw that the young man made longer strides and the team went faster. All this meant something.

"Eunice, my dear," said the class-leader at the dinner-table, "you noticed how poorly Isadore looked Sunday. I think she ought not to stay alone. Can't you spare Mercy to stop there till she gets better?"

"I need Mercy, *I* think, more than Isadore does. She has a hired girl."

"But that is not like one of your own in time of sickness."

"She is not very sick, Horace. She rides about every day."

"She is worse than we realize, wife. I fear she is in a consumption. Perhaps she will swop her hired girl for Mercy, for the sake of having one of her own to stay by her in her decline, and that would be to your advantage, for the girl is stronger and can do more than Mercy."

All this in Mercy's presence. When she left the table, which she always did first, and tripped into the garden to see if the china-aster seeds had sprouted, Horace Ryder told Eunice his wife the vision that came to him as he ploughed in the field. Then Eunice thought she could do alone, and they had better not speak about Isadore's hired girl, but let Mercy be a lady like the rest of the neighbors, and maybe Dennis Canfield, the bachelor of thirty-six, would get in the way of dropping in. Eunice understood all of Isadore's plans. She made a clean breast of the whole matter, when she drove over with the reins in one hand and the secret in the other.

So Mercy was called to wash the dishes, while Eunice packed her little trunk, and Horace very placidly took one of the team-horses and harnessed it in the little boat-box wagon, saying very blandly that there were other things he could do that afternoon, and the ploughing could wait. Only yesterday Thomas Jones asked him for a horse to go after the doctor for Widow Rice, who was taken suddenly and violently ill and he could not possibly spare it. He was behind-hand in his spring's work, and must use his team every day. Honest Tom saw the Ryders, mother and daughter, drive by, and made it in his way to hail the class-leader who was cutting elders, — in classic phrase,

"Sambuci," — by the roadside ; not for "wine," but for the purpose of extermination. These bushes undermine and rot the fences.

"How *did* you happen to spare that horse, neighbor Ryder?"

"Oh, our daughter Isadore is very sick, in a consumption, and her mother and Mercy felt so terrible bad about it, I sent them right over."

"You did right, neighbor. But I've been reading lately about that journey from Jerusalem to Jericho, and I think we don't quite come up to the mark when we just watch our own little narrow pen. For my part, I believe it is as much my duty to go after the doctor for Widow Rice as for my Mary. It won't do to let folks lie bleeding by the roadside, if they ain't exactly our wife and children. We must take care of them, neighbor Ryder. That's my religion."

"Yes, yes, certainly. How is Widow Rice to-day?"

"She is very sick. My wife says she is in less distress than yesterday, but she breathes hard, and won't get over it in a hurry. She got her feet wet the other day trying to plant her garden. I ploughed it in the morning, and told her I would plant for her next day. But she's independent in her feelings, you know, and because I wouldn't let her make my spring trousers, she did the planting herself, and I'm afraid has got her death by it. I told her Mary could make my breeches, — she knew how and liked to do it, and I'd be too much ashamed to wear the *clothes* of a man if I should catch myself taking pay for ploughing a little patch of garden for a widow. Zounds! Mary may be a widow some time, and I'd haunt the man that would dare to charge her for such little things!"

"Yes, certainly! What's the matter with Sister Rice?"

"Matter! she's got the lung fever the worst way. And besides, there is not a thing in the house in the shape of food except what we have carried in, and I have a paper here for you to sign. If I was rich, Horace, I would not take such a thing round among my neighbors; but you know I'm pinched and have not the means to carry the widow through an expensive sickness without help." Horace knew where the pinch was. He held the mortgage on Tom Jones' farm, and made him pay up punctually. If that was ever lifted, Tom would make his way.

"We sign produce, you see, if we have that plentier than money, and it must be carried right in. Perhaps you, being the richest man in the neighborhood, would not object to signing money, to get the medicine, and groceries, and such things."

Horace looked over the paper. There was a terrible struggle going on within him between pride and parsimony, as he saw the names of his neighbors and the liberality with which they had subscribed. There was the name of Sanford, the small farmer, and over against it a bushel of wheat, and five pounds of butter. He thought this decidedly foolish. No doubt they would have to eat corn-pone all summer to pay for it; they did not raise much wheat.

After awhile, in which Jones had to tell him he must hurry, as he had more places to go to, Horace Ryder gave a half-dollar, and a bushel of potatoes. He had plenty of potatoes and could spare them.

"Take the potatoes right down there," said Jones,

with a tone of contempt in his voice, which his neighbor did not discover.

"As soon as my wife comes I will," he answered, and Jones went out of sight singing a snatch of a hymn he had often heard on Ryder's lips, —

"A charge to keep I have,
A God to glorify,
A never-dying soul to save,
And fit it for the sky."

"Humph!" said Jones to himself after he had finished the singing. "He'll surely save it, if he watches it as close as he does his money, unless it grows so little he can't see to watch it any longer. Ha, ha! It's small now in my judgment, but I suppose I must not say that, for he has religion, and I, not having any, am not fit to judge."

Thomas Jones was called a man of the world, but he had a noble, generous nature, and tried to follow the golden rule as his rule, and the lesson of the journey from Jerusalem to Jericho, as a lesson which did not die in the past. Often neighbor Ryder labored with him about the salvation of his soul, but so long as Ryder failed to be a more liberal helper than others, his words fell unheeded by Jones. He liked best his own theory which could so easily be put in practice. And then his theory in practice was a help to such as Widow Rice.

When Eunice Ryder came home at evening and had told Horace that she met Dennis Canfield, and he was very good-looking, indeed, and not old for thirty-six, all before she remembered to state the exact condition of Isadore's health, the class-leader, out of whose mind

the subscription paper had not been for a single minute, said he must take something to Sister Rice, who was very sick, some potatoes, he thought, and perhaps his wife had better go along. Lung fever was not catching.

A "lock" of hay was thrown before "Sorrel" and she nibbled while Ryder ate his supper. Eunice had supped with Isadore, and it was a marvellous feast.

"Sauce-plates, Horace. It is a new fashion. We must have some right off. Instead of everybody dipping in the same dish, Isadore and the friends over the river take out the preserves on little plates not much bigger than the bottom of a teacup, and hand them round. It is a nice way, and saving, too. We must have some."

And Horace hearing the last part of his wife's speech, thought it best to have some.

When they arrived at the Widow Rice's gate, somebody was splitting wood in the dusk. Before the class-leader had reached the door with his burden of potatoes, he knew the chopper was Wesley Sanford.

"Good evening, Wesley," he said blandly. "I am glad to see you doing your duty. We should all do what we can in time of sickness."

Wesley responded briefly, not stopping his strokes, nor caring to talk much till the widow's woodpile was somewhat larger. Tom Jones had just laid down his axe to go after the doctor again, for the widow was worse; but while the two chopped so near they could talk; and Wesley knew there were potatoes in Ryder's bag, and he had the best house in the neighborhood, and a hall and a striped carpet. As he thought

about it he was almost willing to be called an infidel by such a man.

Within the little room, Eunice saw Mary Jones and Rachel Sanford going about noiselessly, and with a tender look upon their faces. In a corner sat Susan with her face to the wall, and covered with tears. She interpreted the labored breathing and the hushed movements of the neighbors as premonitions of the entrance of death.

Horace found things so much worse than he anticipated, that instead of making a presentation speech over his bushel of potatoes, as he had intended to do, he knelt beside the widow's bed and prayed. She was delirious and it did not help her any. There seemed nothing more for him to do, and as Rachel and Mary were there, and they were more used to sickness than Eunice, he thought it best to drive home.

By the time "Sorrel" was unharnessed and fed, and the two were wrapt in talk about how best to manage Mercy, there was an audible knock on the hall-door, and the response, "Come in," ushered before them a presence entirely strange in that wide kitchen. Wesley Sanford had not been there since they built the new house. He used sometimes to drop in when they lived in the old one,—but that was away back when he counted himself a little boy.

His advent was a sudden shock to the Ryders. They had been talking about him; and Ryder in his confusion came very near blundering out the old adage; but instead, he recovered himself and showed Wesley a chair.

Wesley proceeded at once to business. "Some

time ago, Mr. Ryder, you told father that I went to infidel meetings; but for that I cared little as it opened the way for me to make an explanation to our folks which I only waited opportunity to make. But I understand you still continue to repeat not only that, but that I myself am an infidel. My parents are satisfied after hearing me explain my position that I am not an infidel; and I want my neighbors to be satisfied too. So I came down here to have a talk with you about it."

"Really, brother,—neighbor Sanford, I thought it my duty as class-leader to tell your folks where you went to meeting. I certainly meant no harm to you by it. I only wanted to,—you know parents ought to have care over their children; that is duty—duty, neighbor. I should want Brother Sanford to do the same by me."

"But why do you call me an infidel? It is bold business to give a man such a title, simply because he worships God at another altar."

"Why, Wesley, if my memory serves me, I have not mentioned anything about it outside your own house. I thought it my Christian duty to tell your folks."

"Then there must be a mistake somewhere. I have heard that you are in the habit of calling me an infidel whenever you speak about me."

"Certainly, certainly, a mistake. I should not think of doing such a thing. Who has reported the like?"

Wesley had no notion of betraying his reporter. Even then he inhaled the soft perfume of spring blos-

soms, from a little budget in the bosom of his vest, and the sunbonnet string made fast the strip of paper; and he said he could not tell.

"All mere gossip, gossip, Wesley. It is not worth while to trouble ourselves about gossip. You know I have a profound respect for your folks, all of you. I consider you a noble race,— noble, Wesley."

Wesley thought it time to leave. The squirming of Ryder made him sick at heart, but he knew where the truth lay, and had the reporter been other than Mercy, he would have fastened him so he could not squirm.

There was no point of attack, and no chance to measure swords with the class-leader, and as Wesley Sanford, walking home in the still spring air, thought about the sick widow, the potatoes, and the quibble, which was a real lie, he could not help concluding that all is not gold that glitters, and that there is a good deal of sounding brass in the world. Hearty Tom Jones made no pretensions, but he struck sturdy blows if a widow's fire burnt low, and was ready to use his whole ponderous strength if anybody's ox fell in the ditch, even though it were Sunday. Wesley's eye saw disparity. His ear heard discord. Something must be done to harmonize the world's faith and life. In his view Tom Jones ought to be class-leader.

CHAPTER VI.

MERCY AND THE ORPHAN.

FOUR days afterward, there was a long procession of carriages of every conceivable description winding through the Sanford neighborhood to the little Methodist meeting-house. The foremost bore the still form of one whose needle had dropped forever from her icy fingers. The last labored breath had come to silence; and Widow Rice had gone into that country "where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest." To her it was a welcome rest. Many a time as she sat stitching until midnight over garments for such of the neighbors as would rather hire than do their own sewing, because it was cheaper, visions of the home of her husband came to her, and she longed for the reunion. It would be so sweet to go where "they hunger no more"; so sweet to be wrapped forever in the arms of entire and perfect rest. The widow was weary. Life had been a hard struggle. While her husband lived it was a struggle, he was so poorly compensated, but then there was love and sympathy to bear them up. Afterward her house was cold, only as she felt the warmth of her child's heart. But this steady work for bread made her sometimes almost forget that life had any good, and think of heaven as the garner of all treasures.

Had the neighbors come to her with readier sympathy, there might have been a brighter fringe along her path. But when Rachel Sanford and Mary Jones were counted out, there seemed no hearty love anywhere. And so when sickness came there was no resolute will to wrestle with it; no clinging love of life to keep the pale messenger at bay. "Susan was almost a woman, and she was a ready scholar. She could soon make her way in the world." This, Widow Rice had said to Mary Jones before she became delirious. Evidently she gave up from the first.

And now that she was really dead, all the people for miles around turned out to bury her. Perhaps they thought in this way to make amends for their indifference. But most likely they did not realize that they had been indifferent. It was the fashion of the place to have large funerals.

The minister gave the departed widow a saintly character; he spoke of the coats and garments which, like Dorcas of Bible times, she had made, and told the people there was no doubt but Christ would raise her up at the last day to sit at his right hand. Then he exhorted them to be "also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh," and afterward they buried her under the spring grass by the side of her husband.

Susan went home with Thomas and Mary Jones. The Ryders saw her stop at the house of this man of the world, and after they were safe under their own roof, and had shaken off the awe of death by a hearty supper, they held a conference over it.

"Horace, Isadore whispered in my ear that Dennis

Canfield *had* called, and he was very attentive to our Mercy."

"Yes. Well, it will be a fine match for Mercy. Canfield is well off."

"Now I have been thinking that Susan Rice is left alone in the world, and the work is rather hard on me without Mercy, and we had better offer her a home. It would be cheaper than to hire a girl, and you know haying and harvest are coming, and then we have a good many hands."

"Yes. I have been thinking just so. And it is a scandal to the church too to have a minister's child dependent on a worldling like Jones. It would help Susan in her social relations to become a member of our family, and for the present Isadore's health requires that Mercy stay with her."

"Suppose you go right away and offer her a home, It will brighten up the poor girl, I know. It is not at all likely that Jones can make a home for her. They have only taken her in for a day or two. They are too poor."

"Perhaps I had better not go to-night. She seems in very deep grief, and might give us a more favorable answer if we should wait a day or two."

"But somebody else might get her, Horace; and then you would have to hire a girl. I think you had better go to-night."

"I suppose we could make a sort of member of the family of her, and not pay her wages."

"Oh, no. We won't pay her wages. And then if Mercy stays over the river she will need some new clothes, and Susan, you know, could take her old ones, and we should not have to get anything for her."

"I guess I'll go right down to Jones' now. Perhaps, as you say, somebody else might get her."

"Don't mention about the work, Horace, but just offer the home, and you can say how much Mercy likes her. She has been brought up to work, and of course will take right hold."

Thus equipped, Horace Ryder made his appearance in the little house occupied by Tom Jones, and on which he held a very satisfactory mortgage. He did not see anything of Susan, but talked solemnly about the warning of Sister Rice's departure, and Jones thought he had come to give him one of his customary lectures, with death and eternity as a text, as usual. He was thinking about the half-dollar and the bushel of potatoes, and had a broadside ready for the class-leader, when the conversation was adroitly turned by Horace himself, who may have seen the nervous fumbling of Jones' fingers, and the repeated crossing and recrossing of his legs, and had some suspicion of the broadside.

"There's quite a stir about going West in Isadore's neighborhood. Solomon Flint has sold out, and will move in the fall, and a number of the neighbors are talking strong of going. Flint says it is nonsense to grub here in this frosty region. The land out in Ohio where he's been is mellow as an ash-bed; not a bit of hard-pan. Isadore's husband has the fever, and I shouldn't be surprised to hear any day that he has sold. He's had an offer for his farm, but not quite so much as he asks for it."

"I suppose if Smith goes you'll feel like pulling up stakes, you set so much by Isadore?"

"Well, I don't know. I think I'm about stationary here; always lived here so, but I don't know as I could bear to be parted from Isadore."

"You'd get rich faster there, neighbor Ryder, if the land is as mellow as Flint says, and that's worth trying for, you know."

"Yes. But with the warning we've had to-day, that 'all flesh is grass,' riches don't seem of much account," said Horace, with a sigh such as he knew how to make. "Where is Susan? I thought she stopped with you."

"She is up stairs. Poor child, she is terribly cut down by the loss of her mother."

"A mournful dispensation; a warning to us to prepare to meet our God."

"More of a warning to us to do our duty on the earth, I think. 'The sting of death is sin,' Paul says. If we behave ourselves as we ought to, we shall die easy enough."

"But eternity, neighbor! Eternity with its endless rewards, and endless punishment; we should think about that. 'After death the judgment,' you know."

"The judgment won't hurt us if we remember and act as though we loved our neighbor as well as ourselves. That's the law of life, and there are no scarecrows in eternity to the man who keeps it."

"Oh! good works can't save us! Repentance and faith are the way to everlasting joys."

"The man who does the good works proves plain enough that he has the faith,—faith in his brother man, anyhow. And I don't see what he has to repent of."

"Native depravity,—a state of original sin, neighbor; we must be changed from that to a state of grace."

"Nonsense! I'm not depraved, unless I deprave myself by doing some little mean thing. And I'm not a sinner either, unless I sin. I'm not answerable for the shortcomings of my neighbors."

"But you know the sin of Adam was visited on us all."

"The sin of Adam was disobedience, and he got his pay for it by being driven out of the garden. If we commit the same sin, I suppose we get the same pay, but we are not held responsible for any of Adam's old debts. All the Lord requires of us is to square up our own accounts."

"Yes, honesty is a good moral virtue," said Horace, not understanding Tom Jones, and thinking about the mortgage.

"By the way I came down to sympathize with Susan, and show her the kindness of our hearts in her deplorable condition. Won't you call her down, neighbor?"

"The girl has been crying so she won't care to come down, Mary," as the wife rose to obey the class-leader, — "Mr. Ryder can call again, can't you? when she feels calmer. Poor child! she ate no supper, and has lain down, I think."

"'Tis a busy time of year, and I don't know when I can come again. The fact is I get too tired to go out after ploughing all day. To-day was a sort of holiday; or, I shouldn't say that either. But the funeral broke in so that I did not plough much, and feel quite fresh

to-night. I guess Susan would not object to coming down if she knew who had called."

Mary looked at her husband for consent, but did not see it. Nevertheless she started up stairs. The respect due Ryder demanded it. Susan, who had been broken of her rest for a whole week, had cried herself to sleep, and Mary thought it a pity to break it. But in those days excuse for non-appearance was not rendered so easily and flippantly as now, and Mary did not think she could go down and tell their neighbor that Susan slept, and needed the sleep. So she shook her gently and awakened her.

"Mr. Ryder has called on purpose to see you, dear; do you feel like going down?"

Susan remembered the ordeal through which she had just passed, when every crumb of sympathy was seasoned with a warning, for she was not yet a member of the church, and shuddered at the thought of meeting the class-leader. But she supposed she must, as he had called on purpose. So, without even washing off the tears, she went down stairs with Mary.

Mr. Ryder met her with a cordiality quite new and refreshing. His face was not nearly so solemn as usual. He told her immediately that he and his wife had talked the matter over, and concluded that as she was Mercy's best friend, and left all alone now, they would offer her a home with them; a permanent home where she should be considered one of the family.

Susan thought of Mercy with her sweetness and tender grace, and her heart leaped out to embrace this offer. Nobody in the world seemed so near, not even Tom and Mary Jones, who had watched when their

meal was out, and come in with their ready help many a time when the last slice was on the table. They had said nothing about a home; only "Come right to our house, Susan," and she knew they were poor. So she told Mr. Ryder, as well as she could through her tears, how grateful she felt for his offer of a home. She hoped to support herself by teaching another year at any rate, but she should be so glad to live with Mercy, and have a spot she could call home to go to.

Thereupon Mr. Ryder took his leave, merely adding he hoped she would come right away so as to get wonted. And next day Susan went.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW THE LOT FELL.

THE following autumn witnessed some changes in the little circle of our acquaintances, incidentally introduced through knowing something about the Sandfords on the Susquehanna. Mr. Flint poured such an incessant stream of big stories into the ears of first one neighbor, then another, that enough families had concluded to make the western journey with him to form quite a colony. And among them he counted the family of John Smith, which consisted of John himself, and Isadore his wife, and her sister Mercy. I may as well own that Mercy Ryder did not emigrate without some stout opposition, and decided conscientious compunctions. But the state of Isadore's health was in no wise improved, and Horace and Eunice considered it absolutely imperative that Mercy should go, and were not slow in telling her the same, especially when she set up her will against it. Susan Rice had slipped into the place of daughter, all but the affection, and hired girl, all but the pay. Mercy had spent the whole summer at Isadore's, and Dennis Canfield had dropped in a good many times. So far, most of his talk had been with John about horses and cattle, and the right time for cutting hay, with an occasional peep at Mercy, when she stayed in the same room, which Isadore always

saw, and interpreted as meaning something. And Dennis Canfield was going with the emigrants to become one of the western colony. His mother, whose health was "poorly" when we first became acquainted with her, had "shuffled off this mortal coil," and left her mature boy to buffet the world alone. If we consider his lonely condition, it will not seem strange that he dropped in for an occasional talk with John Smith, who carried such a rich flavor of life in his speech; and look at Mercy Ryder, who had the color of the ripe cherry upon her round cheeks, the sight of which bore his thoughts an unimaginable distance away from death's-head and cross-bones. And if we remember the exact attitude of Horace Ryder and Eunice his wife, we shall not be surprised that they considered Isadore's health as actually demanding Mercy's care and attention after they ascertained that Dennis Canfield had sold his farm with a view to joining the emigrants.

So Mercy had to pack away her tears in the little trunk, and stifle the rest, and get into the covered wagon with John and Isadore. Her father thought he should sell, the first favorable opportunity; and follow his children; and then perhaps little Mercy would dry her tears. He *hoped* she would dry them long before, by becoming the wife of Dennis Canfield, who had sold his place for enough to start out West as king of the colony.

The "Academy" had really started, with a corps of competent teachers, and Charles walked his three miles without fatigue, and studied Latin on the way besides. There seemed now no obstacle in the way of an educa-

tion, which he coveted most of all things. All he wanted was time and teachers in order to reach the goal of his ambition. The teachers he could find at the academy ; and after the potatoes were dug and the corn husked, Loudon told him he could have the time until the season for spring's work to begin.

Wesley, our hero, whom we have left to take his own course for six months, without any of our scrutiny, found a little crisis in his life, just as the leaves began to fall. It was not especially the emigration of Mercy, and yet it was precipitated by that. All the long months since the close of the winter school, he had seen her but a single time. Then he found her walking in a path over which he went in his journey to and from the school-house with light in its windows. The meetings now were held in the daytime, and less frequently than during the winter. As he turned homeward over a wooded cross-path, which he liked for its silence, and with bowed head thought of the sermon, going over every point of logic, and writing it indelibly on his memory, the little figure of Mercy Ryder flitted before him. Instinctively he reached out his hand, and Mercy took it herself, not having any basket to place in it. But their paths diverged ; that is, if she went towards Isadore's and he towards home. Wesley, so used to leading her from the school-house did not seem conscious of this. He kept her hand, and she, though she knew she was going the wrong way, went right along. Wesley began immediately to talk about the meetings he went to, and to explain what an infidel is, and that he was not one, taking out a little withered budget of flowers from the bosom of his vest,

attached to which was a strip of paper he used as text. Mercy listened, full of awe and interest. When he told her what he really did believe, she thought it a beautiful faith, and wanted to know more about it. She said so; and Wesley told her she must read the Bible; it was all written there. But to simplify the matter, and give her a brief history of the denomination in this country, he gave her the "Life of Murray," which he said he knew all by heart, and had taken to meeting to lend to Andrew Simpson, but Andrew was not there.

By-and-by these young people reached the main road, and though Wesley still talked on unconscious of space or time, Mercy came to herself enough to know she was some distance from home and said so.

"What makes you live at Isadore's, Mercy?"

"She is not very well and wants me."

"Why not let Susan Rice go there and you come home?"

"Father and mother think Isadore ought to have her own sister. They think she is in a consumption. But she is not, Wesley."

"I know what they're up to, Mercy. They want you to marry Den Canfield."

"What! That old bachelor? Why, no, Wesley. If they do, I shan't," — the latter clause added after a second thought, in which some past things were revealed to this unsophisticated girl.

"That is what they are aiming at, you may depend. I can read them."

"I shall never do it, Wesley. You may remember that."

"If I had as many acres as he has, you shouldn't — that is, if you were willing to marry me, Mercy." All this, while standing in an undecided way at the end of the cross-path, and still holding the little hand.

"We are both mere children yet, Wesley, and ought not to think of getting married these good many years."

"I should not have thought of it, if I had not seen a plan to give you to that goose of a Canfield."

"We should not speak lightly of anybody, Wesley. Canfield is not very smart, I know; but there ain't many smart as you are, and we should be charitable."

"I will be charitable, I'll go and mow the poor fellow's hay, if you won't let him steal you."

"He can't steal me. I'm not to be stolen. But I must go back. See, it is almost sundown, and it is more than three miles to Isadore's." And she turned, and tripped lightly on.

"Going back alone, Mercy!"

"I don't know."

"Well, I do. You are not."

And Wesley started after her, taking the little hand again as soon as he had reached her side.

"I'll go with you through the woods, and as near to John Smith's establishment as you will let me."

"I should like to have you go all the way, Wesley, if you are not tired."

"I am not tired. But what will Queen Isadore say?"

"She is not queen over me. You need not be afraid of her."

So Wesley went all the way, clear to the very door,

and he and Mercy stood some time on the porch and talked, and John and his wife saw the whole from an uncurtained window. After that they were very kind to Mercy, and took her to father's on the day of the "infidel" meetings. And that is the way it happened that Wesley only had an occasional glimpse of her face, and never another word with Mercy. And now she had gone West, and there were all sorts of names for the place where the colony had settled.

But I have rattled on, and have not told you what I meant by the crisis which came when the leaves fell.

The starting of the emigrants was talked about for several miles around; and as they had gone West to widen their acres, naturally enough those who talked about them, fell next to thinking of their own prospects; and a little reflection on the subject convinced Loudon Sanford that his small farm would be nothing at all divided between the two boys, and one of them would have to do something else. So he laid the matter before Wesley and Charles so that they might decide as early as possible which should stay, and which should go.

They talked the matter over in a jovial way, without considering at all the question of fitness for this or that profession; and, after concluding that one of them should be a doctor, they tossed up a cent to see which it should be. The lot fell upon Wesley. He being the elder, it seemed best to the parents that he should go to a profession, and let Charles stay on the farm. No sooner was the decision reached than Wesley began the work of preparation. He borrowed books of the village doctor, studied at home, and went to him

to recite, or for examination in progress, I should more properly say, and explanation of intricacies and mysteries. He entered this new field with all the enthusiasm of his nature, and found much about the study of medicine that gave him real satisfaction. He looked upon man as the temple of the living God, and thought it no ignoble occupation to be able to minister to the ills which flesh is heir to.

Susan Rice, whose knowledge of grammar and the location of places on the map was quite equal to the demands of a common country school, felt some doubts about being able to pass examination in arithmetic, as she looked forward to the coveted independent work of a teacher, which she desired to begin in the following summer. She laid the matter before the guardians of her "home," and asked the privilege of attending the winter school. Horace and Eunice Ryder thought she had education enough, and told her it seemed foolish to them for young women to spend their time in that unproductive way. They hinted that Susan would want to get married some time, and she ought to begin to get ready by degrees for so momentous a change in her condition. There was a large quantity of flax and tow to spin that winter, and Susan should have a "share" of all the cloth she would make, — the share to become her lawful property on the day of her marriage.

Susan had not got so far as to think about sheets and table-cloths of her own, her mind was fixed on teaching school, but she went about the spinning, nevertheless, because they who gave her a home required this little service.

Day after day the treadle of the little wheel went up and down, under the motion of Susan's foot, and the flax slipped steadily off the distaff through her busy fingers. And day after day she kept thinking of the sums in the back part of the book, and fearing that she could not do them, if any of the scholars in her ideal school should get over so far. Regularly at evening when the wheel was put away, and the supper dishes washed, Eunice Ryder brought out two sets of knitting work and laid them on the table, and regularly Susan took up one and clicked the shining needles swiftly until nine o'clock. Then, if she was not too tired and sleepy to cipher, she had the privilege. If she was tired, she forgot it in the sweet vision of an independent avocation, which she hoped this nightly endeavor would open to her. So she puzzled over the hard sums until she was obliged to lay aside her slate from utter exhaustion. After a while she came to a sum she could not do. Three evenings — after nine, remember — she worked over it, trying in every possible way she thought to do it. But it would not come right, and she hated to go on and leave it. She could ask help of the "master" if she ever had time. But after nine very likely he would be in bed. And John Irons who was said to work until midnight over some astronomical calculation had made himself sick by it. He was too old to neglect care of the body without a speedy reckoning. The reckoning comes to all who overwork or abuse themselves, but the young, with their strong sinews, may keep it awhile at bay. John Irons was under the doctor's care, and that very day, Horace Ryder had said the old man was "out of his head," so Susan could not go to him.

She had seen Charles Sanford going by to the Academy about the time she sat down to spin; and we must own not without a twinge of something akin to covetousness of his fine opportunity. He could help her, but he would be full of his own work. She heard, through the gossip of the neighbors who called, that he had three or four studies, and his whole time must be occupied by them. She thought about the hard sum as she sat at her wheel and her knitting-work, and tried to lay some proper plan to obtain the needed help. Finally she concluded to go up to Sanford's, after Charles returned from the Academy, and ask him to help her. Rachel was her mother's best friend, the friend of her heart, and the boys were school-fellows; she saw no harm in it, only she did not like to take Charles' time.

After coming to this conclusion, she thought the sooner she went the better for her progress. So, when the wheel and the supper dishes were out of sight for the night, she did not seem to see the other set of knitting-work, but put on her shawl and hood as if for a walk.

"Are you going out, Susan?"

"Yes. I want to go up to Sanford's a little while this evening. It is a long time since I saw Mrs. Sanford, and I yearn to see her." This was true; but the main object in view Susan did not care to speak of. She said nothing about the sum, knowing they thought her work after nine only a waste of time and candles.

"But, Susan, you know we want to get these stockings done this week, and to-day is Thursday. I don't think I would go to-night. Wait until Sunday night

and go then. There's a prayer meeting at Brother Sanford's Sunday night."

Susan did not know before that the stockings must be finished that week, and looking down at her knitting work she thought there would be little chance to do the sum if she must toe that off before Sunday.

"*Must* this be finished?" she asked, looking at Mrs. Ryder.

"I think one pair of stockings a week is not a hard task; we ought to average one pair a week each of us, especially these short ones we are knitting for sale."

Susan stood a moment in an undecided way. She was thinking about how much liberty she had given up for a home. When her mother lived she could go to Sanford's for an evening if she wanted to, though the fact that they had two big boys, and no girl, kept her from indulging her admiration and reverence for Rachel all she desired to. But it was a good deal to take in a homeless orphan, she thought, and perhaps this curtailed liberty was but an adequate return. Then she untied her hood quickly, and throwing it down with her shawl, in somewhat of a nervous haste, she took up the other stocking and kept pace with Mrs. Ryder, who found they would be obliged to knit until ten in order to finish the pair on Saturday night. While she knit she thought. She must go on with the arithmetic or fail in her purpose, and lose the object of her life. Another plan presented itself. There is always a way, if we seek diligently for it, no matter how closely we seem to be hemmed in, and a true purpose will not fail if joined with a persistent will. Plan number second was a little bolder in its conception, perhaps, than the

one which had been foiled by Mrs. Ryder and the knitting-work ; but after it was formed, Susan felt at ease, and did not lie awake thinking about the sum.

In the morning she watched from her window for Charles Sanford to come in sight, and when she saw him coming, the treadle stopped, and the distaff fell quickly from her fingers. In a minute more she was out by the gate talking with the Academy boy. And the sequel was, that very night, after he had made sure of his own lessons, he went down to Ryder's and did the sum so quickly, Susan thought him a genius, sure enough, as Master Stokes had said. He felt a little gratified at being called on for help, and made special promises of more of the same sort, if Susan should need it, and if she should, she could "just shake her distaff in the window, and he would come that very night after nine." He always studied until nine.

Charles got in the way of watching for the distaff, and he saw it somewhat often, for girls are generally dull at figures, — but he did not see it any too often. He thought it a grand thing for a girl to try to know something, and get clear over to the hard sums in the back part of the book. And after a while he who thought Wesley silly to carry Mercy Ryder's dinner basket, began to do quite as silly things himself. Howbeit he did not think them silly, but grand. He did sums.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WESTERN COLONY.

I WOULD like to let my characters slip over the five years of preparation which Wesley and Charles had to give before they were ready for life's work; but I don't know as you would quite pardon me for leaving Mercy so long in the unexplored woods. Most persons feel more interest in the story of men and women after they have stopped going to school. They like to hear about their endeavors and successes; especially whether they are successful in making money, and marrying the one they love. Now, as far as possible I want to tell a pleasant story. The possible with me, you will understand to be entirely bounded by the realm of truth. So I will pass as lightly as possible, over those years when Wesley studied human anatomy, and, for variety, ploughed and mowed, and dug potatoes; and Charles mumbled Latin and a little Greek, and also diversified his intellectual table by some of the same hay and potatoes. To me, personally, much interest attaches to young years. The fact is, ever since Ned looked at me for the first time, with that peculiar expression of babyhood which I interpreted as a very striking attempt to say "papa," I have been extremely interested in all

sorts of childhood, even the very smallest. And when I say in the beginning of this chapter, that I would "*like*" to pass over five years, you will understand that word as relating entirely to the author, and not the preferences of the father.

It is not pleasant to have so wide a distance between objects of interest, as divides Sanford's on the Susquehanna, from that young colony in Eastern Ohio, especially without the connecting links of railroads and telegraphs; but if such conditions are according to life, we must make the best we can of our facts.

Mercy Ryder, when she felt the ties which bound her to home snapping, and the vision of her native place receding, and then lost to view, became uncontrollably heavy-hearted; and showers of tears washed her cherry cheeks, which Isadore greatly feared would make her less interesting in the eyes of him whom prophet Ryder had marked as "king of the colony." But Canfield evidently intended to take his own time in courting, without any acceleration from Mrs. Smith's hints; and, if Isadore remarked in his presence, as she was apt to, in order to excuse the tears, "that the wind was spoiling Mercy's complexion," Dennis only stared in a half-comprehensive way, and paid strict attention to his teams and his goods.

The journey was long and perilous. Sometimes they came to an unbridged river which it seemed impossible to ford until they made the attempt and found it could be successfully accomplished. Then a road cut around precipitous hills would set the women in terror of a plunge into the yawning gulf on one hand, while rocks and overhanging trees threatened to

crush them on the other. Miles of causeway over swampy places tried the strength of their wagons, and the strength of their nerves as well. Long reaches of dense woods often overshadowed them, and, in the chill of October, made them wish for the fireside of the old home. To those of the emigrants who cherished bright visions of a soil without "hard-pan," and a climate too soft for frost, all these discomforts were passed over as very trivial annoyances in the pathway of great success. But to Mercy Ryder, who had left her heart in Otsego, save the little portion which Isadore monopolized, the days of this uncomfortable journey were very heavy and dark. When there was a glimpse of sunlight, and fields of rustling corn looked out from behind snug little barns, the sight only made her heart heavier by its suggestions of home. She tried to forget where she was, and whither she was going; and after the journey had become a dull monotony, and her tears were dried a little, because their fountains were exhausted, she held in her hand a book, and read. It looked to Isadore like Mercy's grammar, and she thought it was. So she had some time for unmolested study of the little volume, which was all she possessed that was once Wesley's. It was not the first time she had read it. Night after night, in her little room, when her sister thought her wrapped in sleep, she sat by the little maple stand and read, and could say as well as Wesley, that "she knew the book by heart." But as long as it was to her a visible link connecting each mile of weary travel with the far off and solid past, she liked to hold it before her eyes and turn leaf after leaf of its familiar pages, her heart

happy in delicious dreams. The hopes which were gathering life as she thought of God's provident care of him who wrote this record of his experience when a stranger in a strange land, stayed her young soul though she was half unconscious of their presence. She was reaching out after the unseen. Not the unexplored acres where the emigrants intended to settle, but the mysterious realm of thought, and meditation, and faith. A new life seemed dawning, as she went farther from the old home, a life within life,—a kingdom unseen by the eyes of the emigrants, save as they, too, built its shining walls each for himself. She thought her tears had washed away some veil which hitherto had blinded her to all but external nature. And so, perhaps, they had. To each one of us the soul's consciousness is awakened in a way peculiar to individual constitution and experience. Some grope through life thinking only of lands, and money, and material gain. Their kinship with humanity and with the great God and Father of all, is but dimly apprehended, if, indeed, it be apprehended; and the resolves and aspirations after something nobler and better, which stir the souls of those who know they have souls, these busy materialists know nothing about. They can measure a tree or a web of cotton, or a hundred acres of arable land. They can reckon interest accurately, and adjust expenditures in reference to increased gains. But they cannot measure an act of charity disinterestedly performed, nor a life which is given in sacrifice to a great truth. They cannot understand the meaning of deeds of any sort enacted on a plane of which they have no knowledge.

There is but one way to see the realm out of sight. But one way to appreciate the divine beauty of that realm, and comprehend the meaning of the life largely passed in its light. We, ourselves, must awake to a personal knowledge of the existence of something besides money and acres of land ; and when we rise to the level of a living soul, we shall see and understand. It is an unhappy prospect that so many fail to live as deeply and intensely as they might,—that so many flutter on the surface of things without knowledge of the exhaustless deeps, but it is not discouraging to those who have fathomed somewhat the powers of their own souls, and know thereby the latent possibilities of every human soul, though thickly encrusted in selfishness and greed of gain. If we could rouse the world to a sense of the intimate union of all life, and the increased enjoyment which comes of looking upon Nature, and toiling amid its implements with eyes and hands that have seen and touched the risen Lord, how the measure of happiness would rise and overflow. But to this altitude there must be a gradual growth ; and the fact that already some have reached the highest height, makes us rest in hope for even the most selfish. And so while we are glad that Mercy is finding out how much she may see and enjoy apart from the green fields of home and the companionship of the emigrants, we have faith that even small and selfish Horace himself is “fearfully and wonderfully made,” and some day he will be sure to find it out.

But,—while I have been moralizing, the white moving tents of the emigrants have reached the Pales-

tine of their hopes. Let us look at them a minute. Somebody, to whom there had come rumors of a farther West, must have built the neat log-houses where they transferred the goods long jolted over the difficult way. Somebody had cleared a portion of the land which was to be the home of little Mercy. It was not all forest, but wilder and newer than Otsego, and John Smith counted more acres as his own than ever before. About the doors of his cabin there were signs of woman's love of the beautiful, and the work of her training fingers. Lattices over which vines clambered made the rough posts almost beautiful, and rose-bushes, tame and wild, dotted here and there the little yard. Mercy looked at these, and the great oaks and chestnuts farther off, and thought of God, the good Father, who distributes his gifts with a tender hand, and leaves no spot utterly desolate; and with her little hand upon the heart of nature which seemed so near to her in her solitariness, she went about the work of making the log-house comfortable and homelike. In a few days, order and life looked out from the small windows, and the clean paths which led to the spring and the road. In all the colony there was no door-yard so trim, and no windows so bright with sun and snowy curtains. Soon the house of John Smith became a centre where the emigrants gathered, in the long autumnal evenings, to talk about the past, and plan for the future.

Dennis Canfield had been one of the circle a good many times. He had watched the quiet and frugal ways of little Mercy until the conviction was immovable that he must have her for a wife. It was not very

convenient to go daily to Sol. Flint's for his meals; and not very agreeable to sit down alone all the long evenings. It would be pleasant to see the kettle boil over his own fire, and have a little hand pour his tea under his own roof.

When he had fairly come to this conclusion, he put on his best coat and went to John Smith's. Mercy sat quietly reading. It was Sunday, of course. The emigrant finds no time week-days for going to see the girls. Isadore was quite sure this visit meant something. Indeed, she was always quite sure when Mr. Canfield called that the object of his visit was to ask the hand of Mercy, and always did what she could to open the way. But John generally talked on as though utterly disinterested in the matter. This time, however, John was out, and when Isadore had climbed the primitive stairs to the chamber the coast was clear.

Dennis began by saying, "I am terrible lonesome, Mercy."

"So am I. I wish we were all back in Otsego." Then she looked down on her book. Dennis felt encouraged. Mercy, too, was lonesome. He took his chair and moved it up to the table where she sat.

"Suppose you come over and live with me, Mercy."

"I think it is just as lonesome where you live as it is here" (without lifting her head).

"But there would be two of us together, then."

"And so the 'lonesome' would be doubled, Mr. Canfield."

"Why, no. It is living alone makes us lonesome."

"I don't live alone. It is these everlasting woods

that make *me* lonesome, and besides, I miss father and mother."

"I shall have to talk plainer. I don't believe you understand what I mean, Mercy. I want you to marry me."

"Well, I don't want to, and I never shall, Mr. Canfield."

"Why, Mercy! Not marry me? Why, I've got the most land of anybody in the county; I shall be the richest man, too."

"I don't care much about land nor riches either. I can be very well contented without them."

"Are you going to live single always?"

"I shall not get married these good many years yet."

"But I can't wait. I need a wife, now."

"I don't want you to wait. You are old enough now, Mr. Canfield. There is no need of waiting, if you can find somebody to have you."

"Are you in earnest, Mercy?"

"Yes. I never joke about anything. And I am sure it would be wicked to joke about such a serious thing as getting married."

"I don't believe you are in earnest; and I shan't give you up either. You only talk that way because you are modest."

"Well, believe what you like; it will come out just the same in the end."

Mr. Canfield was not disturbed by the answers Mercy had given him. He thought all girls did so at first. All he ever paid any attention to had answered about the same way, and he was old enough now not

to be discouraged by it. So he sat back in his chair in the deliberate posture men sometimes assume when they feel on good terms with themselves, and not much out of sorts with those around them, and Mercy kept on with her reading as though he was not there.

"What book are you reading, Mercy?"

"I should think you would know this book by the looks of it, no matter where you see it."

"I think you might tell me. If I knew, I should not ask," — a little petulantly. Dennis was his mother's baby.

"I will bring it to you, and you shall read a few chapters." So, laying the Bible in the hands of Dennis, she climbed the ladder, and Isadore, who could not speak without being heard, *looked* her feelings and then went down to entertain the forsaken guest.

On the appearance of Mrs. Smith the "chapters" came to a sudden stop, and the Bible was laid on the table.

"Mercy feels very down-hearted to-day. We have heard father is not coming quite so soon as he expected to, and Mercy takes it to heart. You must not mind what she says, Mr. Canfield. It is a way girls often take."

"Oh, I understand: where is John?" And on being informed of the whereabouts of John, Dennis departed to hunt him up, and did not appear in the cabin again that day.

As soon as he was gone, Isadore again climbed the ladder, and Mercy received a lecture for the indifference she had shown to the offer of such a magnificent

alliance, and a warning not to repeat anything of the kind in her house again.

"And if you do refuse to marry Mr. Canfield," said Queen Isadore, with a significant shake of her pretty forefinger, and something of a flash in her eye, "mark my words, you will be as old as he is before you have another as good offer."

. This did not alarm Mercy, though it was somewhat emphatic, and she subsided into reading, as though the current of her thoughts had not for a second been disturbed. But it was not the last caution she was destined to hear. If Isadore saw through the window the figure of Dennis approaching the house, she improved the time until his appearance in telling Mercy how she must treat him. Sometimes her tones were authoritative; sometimes pleading. She tried to rouse John to the importance of doing his part in this necessary work. But John was indifferent, and said, "let matters take their own course." She did write to father and mother that Mr. Canfield had proposed and been refused; though he still came to the house every Sunday, and sometimes stayed all day. She thought a little parental authority was needed in Mercy's case.

At length the authority came. Horace Ryder adjusted his affairs very speedily after receiving Isadore's letter, and though he had to sacrifice something on a few little articles, he thought he should be more than compensated in having so rich a son-in-law as Canfield would be in a few years. His covered wagons appeared in the settlement some time in the month of June, and another young lady was added to the colony. Susan Rice had given up teaching because she thought

duty required it, and made the western journey because she hoped to find a friend. She would much have preferred a home in the house of Tom Jones, had she known that the Ryder house would be empty of Mercy. But now that she was "wonted" and had a "share" in the table-cloths, she thought it better not to make a change. They might think her ungrateful, and if they were going West, she would go along, and maybe next year teach school for the colony. If she had to spin or knit all the time, it would be pleasanter if Mercy's wheel was near to hers, or her knitting humming in the same room. She pined for the companionship of the young. Those little confidences and sympathies which so few mature women seem to invite were something of a burden to Susan unshared. She could not tell Eunice Ryder anything, nor Rachel Sanford, either, now that Charles helped her to do the hard sums.

But when she and Mercy were clasped in each other's arms once more their long pent feelings found vent; and each became the receptacle of the other's secrets.

Isadore's health improved so much on the arrival of her parents, that Mercy was allowed to go home as soon as the new house was ready for its inmates. Horace Ryder was fortunate enough to locate adjoining Dennis Canfield; and as he had built quite on one side of his land, and that the side nearest Dennis, and, therefore, had become that gentleman's nearest neighbor, arrangements were immediately entered into for the accommodation of Mr. Canfield as boarder. His own establishment was locked up, and his goods and

chattels were removed to less "lonesome" quarters. He concluded he would not pass any more evenings in his own house until it was lighted by something better than the huge wood-fire, which he thought would not be the case before fall.

When he was once an inmate of the same house with Mercy, he applied himself to the task of courting with a will. If he chanced to meet her carrying the dishes or a pan of milk into the closet, while he was dodging through the same passage with an armful of wood, he was sure to try to put the other arm around Mercy's waist, the main object of these preliminary motions being a kiss laid very lightly on Mercy's cherry cheeks. And if she dodged, and in trying to save herself from the infliction, spilled the milk, she received a severe reproof for her carelessness. One day she managed to hit Dennis' arm in the scuffle in such a way that the wood came down with a great crash. Then Eunice Ryder came out in breathless haste, thinking the shelves had fallen. She had asserted several times they were not strong enough "for Dennis' milk and theirs too."

If Mercy and Susan strolled in the woods of a summer Sunday, Canfield was as sure to follow them as their own shadows, and the most confidential chat of these girls was not safe from intrusion. He seemed to take it for granted that he was the affianced husband, and, therefore, welcome anywhere Mercy pleased to go. Mercy had been in the habit of going into these "first temples," to think and worship in her own simple way. She liked this communion better than the prayer-meetings her father led. A deeper peace came

to her soul, and her companions were the beloved of other days. But after Canfield came to live there all this had an end. She did not go alone now, at all, but always with Susan, though her presence did not save the ears of this girl from the sound of lover's talk, as soon as their retreat was reached by watchful Dennis. To all his advances Mercy generally preserved an attitude of indifference, only answering him at all when he asked her a straightforward question, which she could not parry with even the help of Susan. But his dogged persistence troubled her. It became to her life like a haunting spectre. Sometimes she feared it was her destiny to marry this man, and that there was no escape. Her parents and Isadore were constantly singing his praises. Nobody took her part but Susan. Many a time this faithful friend saved her from the threadbare repetition of the story of Canfield's milk-and-water love, by giving him to understand that probably Mercy had gone on to Isadore's, she had seen her going farther into the woods when she was hidden behind a fallen tree. Susan would then drop her eyes upon her book; Dennis would call

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home in the same house with her, and could look at her, and follow her, and go with her to all the prayer-meetings or gatherings of any sort among the colonists. She preferred going out with Dennis, to staying at home with him, for if she stayed he was sure to stay.

And that is the way her young life was haunted, without so much as an olive leaf from Ararat to comfort her. Not a word from Wesley through the years, save what Susan brought her. She did not know but the child-love would die out of his heart with childhood. But for all that, she could not sacrifice herself, though regularly as the autumn came round, she was entreated to do so.



CHAPTER IX.

PROPHETS IN OHIO.

HORACE RYDER found that the pioneer spirit of his sect had penetrated the wilds of Ohio, and already circuits were organized, so that he felt no deprivation in regard to religious privileges. Besides the regular weekly prayer-meetings, which were held from house to house, there was the regular service of the minister in the school-house, which occupied the centre of a prospective village. The enthusiasm of cultivating a soil without hard-pan did not for a moment crowd out thoughts of the "charge" which he had to keep, and the "soul" which he must save. He was not more methodical in clearing land, in ploughing and sowing, than in the observance of all the rules and ceremonies of his church, and attendance upon its stated services. And though he did find out after a few springs had smiled and frowned, that there is such a thing as frost in Ohio, the efforts which he put forth to guard his corn and pumpkin-vines never for a moment caused a relaxation of those other efforts which he considered essential to the good of his house. Susan and Mercy were exhorted as often as once a week to get a new heart and become members of the church, but somehow the class-leader's words found no response in the souls of these maidens; and Horace, though he

fully believed that "while the lamp holds out to burn, the vilest sinner may return," nevertheless felt a good deal of fatherly fear, especially for Mercy. Sometimes the big oaks fell, and what if Mercy should be taking a walk through the woods when one came crashing down! Sometimes fierce lightnings rived them; what if Mercy should fall by a thunder-bolt! Always before him, in the midst of such a thought, was the vision of a lake larger than Lake Erie, whose waters were liquid lightnings, and whose writhing life was not fishes, but the everlasting souls of men, — on fire continually, but unconsuming, and forever unconsumed. And for little Mercy, the meekest and whitest lamb in the whole emigrant flock, this doom seemed imminent whenever the wind blew or there was a cloud in the sky. And this fear was Horace Ryder's haunting shadow, making his greed of gain a little less satisfying than it would have been had Mercy eased his heart by becoming a member of her father's church. Isadore was in the fold, and so the pet-lamb was safe. Canfield, too, was in the fold; and if only Susan and Mercy would have responded to entreaty and fearful warning, Horace could have watched his growing crops complacently, and listened to the buzz of the new saw-mill, which was making a new house possible and near, without feeling a single shiver, even in his flesh. As it was, the sight of the long white boards which he drew in loads from the mill, suggested coffins, and "after death the judgment." And so I must tell you that the class-leader was not quite happy, even with the prospect of Canfield for a son-in-law. Not that he was greatly disturbed about his unregenerate neighbors,

for whom he offered prayers at all the prayer-meetings. He had not grasped the great law of love, and not appreciating it or even understanding it, he did not consider it any part of Christian duty to feel deeply concerned about those outside of his own household.

Their safety from the blue eternal fires was that for which he felt a good deal solicitous considering how fast he was getting rich, and it was solely on account of Mercy and Susan that he was not quite happy, — that is, when he meditated upon it, or any swifter current of nature swept the thought of their peril in among the reckonings of his increasing gains.

Susan was not now daily under the eye of the guardians of her home. School-teachers were scarce, and she was granted the privilege of taking up this noble work, by paying tithes for it. That is, Horace and Eunice Ryder dispensed with her labors about the house in consideration of receiving one-half her wages. They thought this only a fair equivalent for the home which they had given her when she was not really a "full hand" at housework. They had been looking forward to the time when she would be strong enough to do much more; and she had then earnestly desired another kind of labor, for which they were willing to spare her, as money was somewhat scarce. She did not teach in their immediate neighborhood. She could have more pay a little further off, though she passed most of her Sundays at home, nearly all of them in fact for the first three or four summers. Her warm love for Mercy made her oblivious to annoyance from other sources; and then Mercy needed her presence on Sunday, as that was Canfield's day of leisure, and she felt safer if Susan was constantly by her side.

But there came a time when Susan did not return to pass all the summer Sundays. Nobody cared much about this, but Mercy ; and she felt each day of absence as a great privation. One Saturday night she dressed herself neatly, and slipped out for a walk, unquestioned by her mother, who thought she was going to Isadore's, and had put on holiday garments in order to appear well to Dennis, whom she would probably meet coming home to supper. But Mercy took good care not to meet him, and the flutter of satisfaction which Eunice felt as the trim little figure tripped away, was a lonely flutter, as Canfield saw not the vision.

This little maiden went lightly and swiftly under the great oaks, and along the borders of fields green and golden, — she went past the garden where John Smith raised the best melons in town, and where both John and Isadore were that moment standing in admiration of the luxuriance about them, along under the shadow of the ten-rail fence, until the acres of her sister were measured, and merged in woods again, and until she had reached the house where Susan boarded, which was four miles from her father's door. She did not feel a bit weary. There was precious inspiration in the errand which had brought her to this unfamiliar spot. Susan Rice had confided in Mercy the reason of her frequent absence ; and this girl wanted to share what had long been to her a coveted boon.

As this locality, where our interest at present centres, grew rapidly in civilization, and the cabins of the settlers began to give place to commodious houses, and the school-house found by its side the church, there

came among the people other religious elements than those appertaining to the Methodist circuit. The ground was disputed by others of the older sects, and also by that singular sect which is historically about the same age as Methodism, but which, being republican in its ideas and modes of promulgation, grows with the growth of enlightenment, and therefore grows more slowly than a church whose every forward step is in the pathway of prescribed rules. The sound of a liberal gospel, which had been listened to attentively a good many years in New England and New York, was stirring the air of Ohio, and calling her thinkers to reason their way to its acceptance. Not yet were temples reared in its name, but "God's first temples" stood ready, with waiting and sheltering arms, and sometimes the school-house door was opened for the gathering of a small number in the name of the Universal Father.

Susan Rice thought it no sin to listen to the message of any minister, though she was herself a minister's daughter, and might have been supposed a little partial to her father's faith. She believed her own common sense a very safe guide in this matter of hearing, and thought herself able to discriminate between truth and falsehood; and being the kind of a girl she was—strong and independent, conscientious and reverent, she went to the grove-meeting the very first time it was held within walking distance, and after listening to the services, which somehow satisfied her as prayers and sermons had never done before, she told Mercy about the meetings, and the ministers whom she had heard proclaiming Wesley's faith.

And Mercy, with the inspiration of a precious hope, walked her way without weariness, and, when locked in Susan's arms, she slept away the hours of Saturday night dreaming of the good in store on the morrow.

Sunday was a day without clouds—one of those rare, silent days when we should not be startled if suddenly along the blue heaven we saw the faces of angels. One higher than angels drops such days from his own right hand, that we may know how fine and fair all nature can be, and how serenely it is possible for a human heart to beat, if it is pure as the summer air.

Susan and Mercy started early that they might be in season for every word of instruction on themes of such intimate interest to all awakened souls. Part of their way lay through the primeval forest. Those giants of the western woods, the oak, the chestnut, and white pine, lifted their shaggy heads far up amid the sunshine, and ever and anon silver rays shot through some bough less densely leafed, and shimmered and glinted about the path where they walked. The squirrel, black, red, and gray, chattered in his special language, relieving them from any thoughts of loneliness, and birds of many hues, and each his native song darted through mid-air, or poured out their music from the shelter of the trees. Sometimes they turned aside from the path to run on the mossy trunk of a fallen tree, or gather the plentiful wood-blossoms and scarlet berries. Their walk was a perpetual delight. No pilgrim to old cloisters ever trod among the relics of departed saints more reverently and gladly than these girls along the passage, mossy and leaf-strown,

which led them to a banquet where every monk and pilgrim of the earth, living or gone on, is provided with a place at the table where "is bread enough and to spare." They seemed to be upborne by arms unseen, and to fly through the intervening distance, so light and airy were their happy souls that day. But when the place was reached where they were to sit and listen, they found if they had walked lightly as on wings, they had not walked swiftly, and were not the first to occupy the board seats in this primitive meeting-house. Too many squirrels had lured them to look after their swift, gliding motion. Too many birds had trilled new songs, and they must see just the plumage of the songster. And the flowers, too, and the berries, were so fresh and fair! Already the seats were nearly filled, and the platform for the minister occupied. Doubly occupied this time. There were two, instead of one. But though these girls blushed a little as many eyes turned towards them, there was no loss in the lateness; the services had not really begun. Only the hymn was being read, as they dropped noiselessly into the attitude of listeners.

Mercy looked at the ministers, while a few voices — some resonant and independent, some trembling and indistinct — sung the hymn. They were very different men personally.* One was large and strong, with a head like Daniel Webster, and clear gray eyes, that were the windows of a great intellect. The other was of slender figure, with soft and tender eyes, and a loving look upon his face, which Mercy thought must be nearer like Jesus' face than any other in the world.

* Ammi Bond and Bushnell Fowler Hitchcock.

His sermon was from those words of Moses, "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as showers upon the grass." It fell upon Mercy's heart like dew, and refreshed all the parched places of her hungry soul. She was wrapped in a sweet and heavenly peace, and was glad of the brief intermission which followed that she might distil the sweets of this heavenly message, and keep them as perpetual incense. She would have been satisfied to retrace her way without hearing another sermon, so blessed had been the influence of this one, but Susan would not consent to go home. The other minister was her favorite. His sermons were strong, like himself, and full of deadly blows, aimed at the prevalent theology. The effect of his speaking upon sympathetic hearers was to make them feel stronger; to gird them about with the panoply of power, and awaken a resolute desire to defend this faith at all hazards and at any cost. He was eminently fitted to be a pioneer of faith. Like Paul he was fearless of opposition, and ready to confront it in the very synagogue of its power.

After Mercy had listened to him, she thought the foundations of her father's faith were thoroughly demolished. About her own heart gathered a firmer purpose, and she was stronger for the strength imparted by this great man. But most congenial was the comfort and the promise of him who seemed Christ-like. It lingered with her a perpetual blessing through the long walk homeward, and many after days, and grew into her life naturally, for it was a part of her very self.

When she reached home it did not quite allay parental anxiety to know she had been to see Susan, for that very day they had heard of the meetings in the grove. When Saturday night came after this, Susan appeared at home, and the girls had no more opportunity to walk in distant woods, or listen to this new doctrine. Closer than ever were they catechised, and more and more strenuous grew the efforts of ministers and class-leader to bring them into the fold. But all availed nothing. They had meat to eat which the world knew not of, and in the silence of meditation Mercy Ryder found rest from the annoyances which she could not outwardly escape.

CHAPTER X.

THE UNCHRISTIAN SACRIFICE.

DENNIS CANFIELD at last grew tired of waiting. He had cleared so much of his farm that his walks had become very long, and besides he did not always hear the dinner-horn. It took a great deal of time to run back and forth to his meals, and on reckoning it up he found it would make quite an item in the course of the year. He thought it no more than right that the new house which had occupied so much of his attention during the summer should be inhabited now that it was finished. He talked the matter over with Horace, who could easily see that Mr. Canfield was right; and Horace counselled with Eunice, who thought it would be well not to have more than one pair of boots with nails in the heels running in and out now that the old striped carpet was down again over the new floor of their new western house, and straightway they concluded that Mercy's waiting and excuses must be stopped. She must be married that very fall; and immediately all possible preparations were made for the event. Mercy sewed diligently on sheets and pillow-cases, not knowing why her mother was in such haste about making them, right in the time when the wool ought to be spun.

Susan was going home one Saturday night, and being somewhat weary stopped at Isadore's to rest, and while there she was informed that Mercy would be married the next week on Tuesday, that being her birthday. After this piece of information she got over being tired, and hurried on. No sooner had she caught sight of Mercy running to the spring with a tin pail in her hand than she beckoned her to come out into the lane. Mercy dropped the pail by the spring and ran joyfully to meet her dear friend.

"Let us go farther off; I want to talk, Mercy."

Mercy put her apron over her head, and they went towards the woods. She thought Susan seemed nervous, but supposed she had been annoyed in her school, and wanted to tell her all about it. When they were far enough away for tolerable seclusion, Susan pointed to a fallen tree, and the two sat down.

"O Mercy! are you going to marry Den Canfield at last, after fighting him away so long?"

"Why, no, Susan. You must think me queer to keep running away from poor Den as many years as I have, and then to turn round and run towards him. What put that into your head?"

"Isadore said, not a half an hour ago, that you are going to be married next Tuesday, and to-day is Saturday."

"It is the first I have heard of it. I thought it queer that mother should sew when we are behind in our spinning; but she said September was a good time to whiten. So it seems she is making the sheets for me. What shall I do, Susan?"

"What do you want to do?"

"I want to go somewhere so far off that Dennis Canfield can't follow me, and I shall never see him any more."

"If I were you I *would* run away. I thought when Isadore told me that you had at last consented. I have heard of women marrying to get rid of a man, or out of pity. For my part, I think it a miserable way to do."

"I shall never do it if I can help it."

"You can help it if you try."

"What if you had not found it out so as to tell me, and the minister had come? I'm afraid I should have been so scared I should have done just what he told me to, and been married before I knew it."

"No, you wouldn't, Mercy. There's plenty of fire in you if you do keep it down. And I think at such a time as that you would be no less a saint to let it blaze. I could obey under all common circumstances, but if anybody told me to marry a man I did not like I would do as I pleased, and take the consequences."

"I feel just so, Susan. But you know I am about as unhappy now as I can be, and maybe the Lord requires me to renounce myself entirely, and deny my own affections. If I made up my mind to marry Dennis, I think I should feel more at ease than I have lately, with him watching me and dodging in my way all the time. I don't love him; in fact, I almost hate him; but if I should conclude to take care of him as a matter of duty, and to make him happy, I should be doing some little good in the world."

"You'd be doing more harm than good. Your little finger is of more value than the whole of Den Can-

field, and you would sacrifice yourself for the sake of making him happy. You would not even do that. Most men are bright enough to find out whether a woman really loves them, or takes care of them out of a sense of duty, and then they get jealous and cross as bears. No, Mercy, you can't make Dennis happy unless you can manage to love him; and really, I don't see where you could begin to do that."

"If Wesley had written to me, and I had any hope of ever seeing him again, I should have something to lean upon. As it is, I try to follow Wesley's faith, and that tells me to love even my enemies."

"But you can't do it. That is, you can't love Den as well as you do Wesley if you try. He is not fit for you at all. I always think of a string of dried pumpkin when I see him."

"I suppose the Lord made him, and we should not make fun of him."

"Well, I'm not going to argue with you. Marry him if you want to; and I begin to believe you do." And Susan shot off towards the house, a good deal out of patience.

Mercy stayed where she was, and began to cry. This plan of her parents was a crushing blow. All the arguments she could bring to try to prove it her duty to obey them only sent the iron farther into her soul. There in her immediate future she saw life-long misery, or an open rupture with her parents, and a disappointment of their cherished plan. She was oppressed as by overmastering weariness. Her strength seemed all to have vanished. She was sick at heart. She did not care what became of her. If a

wolf had come towards her just then she would not have stirred. The night gathered, and she almost wished it could be to her the night of death. Then she could go into that beautiful land which she saw so often through the vision of faith, and where she lived so much of her time. Christ was there,—he who called unto himself the weary and heavy-laden, and she knew he would pity her aching heart, and be her friend. Through her tears she prayed for help and guidance. She wanted to do just right. Would it be right to follow her own heart? In the quiet of her past meditations she had gathered to herself an ideal picture of the highest form of spiritual life. Self-surrender formed the halo of the picture, and its most enrapturing tints. And was not the cup of self-surrender proffered to her lips? Could she not, by taking it, walk the way of martyrs, and even press the foot-prints of Christ? She reached out her hands, as if for the cup. The way He trod looked all luminous to her tear-washed sight, and the roll of martyrs was hung in shining letters above the way. Already her own name appeared dimly among the sainted throng.

Then for a moment she thought what this sacrifice which she was contemplating meant for her, and wondered if any of the saintly multitude were ever called upon to make the same. She tried to remember. They helped the poor, and cured sick folks, and lived in poverty, and mingled with sinners; they endured stripes and prisons; they were tried before kings as state criminals; they died awful and ignominious deaths. And Mercy Ryder, in her weakness, thought all these easy to endure when compared with the sac-

rifice which lay in her path. Then she wondered if she could not serve the Lord, and live Wesley's faith in some other way. Oh, if she could! and this were not really required at her hand! She would toil for the lowliest, if such service could in any way be accepted in the place of this. She could go into hospitals, or be a nun, better and easier than to marry Dennis Canfield.

When Susan arrived at the house, she sat down to read a paper which somebody gave her that day. There was a story in it which was pleasant, and some other good things besides. She became so lost in reading—papers were so thick as flies then—that she forgot she had left Mercy in the woods. After she had read it all through, even some of the advertisements included, she started up and went after Mercy in a very gay and happy mood. She found her lying on the ground, almost unconscious, and a good deal chilled. She tried to rouse her, but found the girl quite unable to walk home. This alarmed Susan, and she ran for help. Horace and Dennis brought a chair, and carried her home in that, and as she seemed very drowsy, Eunice and Susan undressed her and laid her carefully on the bed down stairs, and in a moment she seemed to be sound asleep.

Next day she got up, but seemed weak, and looked pale. The cherry cheeks were not there. Her parents were very tender towards her. They made her try a good many little home-remedies, for the wedding-day was very near, and a sick bride would lessen the enjoyment of the occasion. They did not know the shock Mercy had received, nor the trial her soul had

undergone. They had not observed that her step had been languid all summer, and her breath sometimes deep and heavy. So long as she did not flag in the line of duty they would not be likely to notice any change. But now it was very marked. A run of fever ought not to make more terrible ravages in a healthy young girl than this one agonizing blow had made. Before this she had hoped to escape. Now they had the trap all ready, and she was so weak she feared resistance had died out of her heart. She sat in her chair in a listless, dreamy mood all day, speaking only when spoken to. On Monday she was no better and seemed inclined to sleep. Dennis Canfield went ten miles after a doctor. The old man shook his head when he looked upon her and said it was a "hard case." The girl's life was oozing out at some unseen wound. He administered a tonic and went away. Susan, who could not keep school while Mercy was in such a state, ran after him and talked while he adjusted the stirrups; then she went into the house and said the doctor assured her Mercy would be well in three days. This cheered the family, but Mercy thought he meant she would be well out of the world.

The wedding-day dawned, and after dinner Mercy was coaxed to dress. She obeyed as some little child might have done. John and Isadore, Solomon Flint and his wife, and Miranda, Sol's maiden sister, came in. Mercy looked at them in a dreamy abstracted way but said nothing. Presently the white horse of the circuit preacher trotted down the lane, and then all things were in readiness for the wedding.

CHAPTER XI.

DR. SANFORD.

WHEN Wesley Sanford received his diploma, through the urgent advice of friends, he went back to the city of his birth to locate. People thought the family name, which was an honorable one, would help him to get started in his profession. And, as it proved, their judgment was correct. His patients increased rapidly, and he soon found himself in the midst of a large and thriving business. It seemed almost marvellous to Wesley that he had met with such a degree of success. But old friends who remembered his father's losses rallied around the son, and seemed to try to atone in a measure for neglect in not helping Loudon Sanford himself to another start instead of letting him go into the woods to begin life anew at his advanced years.

But though in the midst of a growing practice, and admired and flattered by those who surrounded him, Wesley did not feel at home. There was something in his nature which shrank from the show and fashion of city life. He liked best the green fields, and long stretches of sky. Towering walls of brick obstructed the vision of his natural sight, and the coverings of fashionable life shut out the hearts of men from that intimate and loving communion which he craved.

In the midst of the multitude he was yet alone. And so the currents of the inner life ran deep, and no living soul touched them; though he daily mingled with the world in every aspect of its weakness and trembling, and daily ministered a word of cheer to sick souls as well as diseased bodies.

Perhaps the little shadow of doubt which had gathered over the memory of Mercy Ryder made him distrustful of the seeming kindness of those who surrounded him. She had said she should never marry Dennis Canfield, and yet before he left Otsego there came rumors of preparation for that event. While he was a student he wrote to her time after time, and though he never received an answer to any of his letters, he did not lose faith until he was assured that she had changed her mind and certainly purposed to marry Canfield. This assurance purported to come in Mercy's own hand, but when Wesley compared it with the strip of paper tied to the withered flowers by a bit of sun-bonnet string, they did not look alike. However, he knew well enough that a young girl's chirography improves sometimes with years and practice, and this letter was more graceful than the little line he knew to be Mercy's. So, doubt crept in, and his life, which had been such a unit, seemed divided and unsettled. Sometimes while he thought about these things, he blamed himself for not going West as soon as he was ready to settle, and ascertaining the real facts. But instead, he had trusted the letter, and gone almost as far as possible the other way. Then he would contemplate the shame his heart must have endured in hunting for a girl already married to

another. Mercy, he knew, was sweet and gentle in temper, and knowing this, he could see how the pressure of circumstances might bring about the designs of Isadore and her parents. And so he tried not to blame Mercy, and could not get angry over the disappointment, but clung to his ideal, and pined and dreamed.

Finally, life in the city became unendurable, and he left his auspicious location suddenly, — “shot off like an arrow,” an old friend of his told me, and they knew not where. “A great piece of folly,” the old man rattled on, “for the family name was a key to position, and Wesley was on the highway to wealth and fame.”

But Wesley did not think it a piece of folly. He was not happy; and he foolishly thought it was because he despised show and city gayeties, and that once out on the green fields, or in the woods, he should be restored to right relations and gain his equilibrium. But in this he found his mistake. When he found himself anchored in a little village, the centre of a new settlement, with practice coming in slowly, he was more restless than before. Whatever else had troubled him in the city he had always enough to do. He was not aware of the power of a fine family name until he settled where that name was no more to the community than any other. Nobody sent for him because they knew his father or mother. In fact nobody sent for him at all unless the old doctor was absent, and the case one of life and death. This was very discouraging, and he thought he would move to some place where there was no old doctor.

He was in correspondence with the postmaster of a little town on the banks of the Alleghany river, and reports from that locality seemed favorable. The doctor who had been settled there was now sick himself,—in a permanent decline, and half the inhabitants for miles around lay sick with the ague. They certainly needed help. Wesley came to a conclusion. He would go to — ; now I will not tell you the real name. If I do, who knows but some of you will find out exactly who Wesley Sanford is, and I promised him I would mystify enough in my story to keep him from being visited from all quarters of the globe as a great lion. I will give the place a prettier name than it really has. I will call it Vinetown. There is a nice propriety, too, in that name. Long, swinging vines of the wild grape hang from the trees along the river margin. The people who live in Vinetown like these grapes, notwithstanding their acidity, and don't pretend to cultivate tame ones to this day; but hold sacred the century growth of nature, and will not allow a tree to be cut down which is clasped by one of them. So all along the river stand sentinels of the olden time. Shaggy with fine moss some of them are, and this, with the trailing vines, gives them a spectral look. Wesley had not seen the place when he concluded to make it his home, but it had been described to him, and he thought he should like it.

When old Dr. Sales heard that the young man from the East was discouraged and going to leave he went immediately to see him. His jolly face as he came into the little office where Wesley sat poring over his books brought a light and warmth with it, really refreshing to the lonesome young man.

"I hear you are going away, Sanford. You have not been here three months yet; seems to me that is getting discouraged a little too soon. You must have more pluck than that."

"I can't live without something to do, doctor."

"See here," said the old man, running his fingers through his hair, "they'll have to give me up before long, and then you'll find enough to do. I own I have not treated you very well. It is hard for an old fellow to think he must be laid on the shelf, and dreading to relinquish any of my practice, and thinking a little too much about myself, I have not realized, as I should, how difficult it is for a young man to get started. But don't go away and I'll make amends."

"I have promised to go, and am already expected. I have delayed starting I know not why. There seems to be a spell over me. But I must go as soon as Tuesday."

"I think you have mistaken your calling. You ought to have been a minister. The man we expected last night would not have preached such a sermon as you did."

"Were you there? I did not see you. I thought the people were all strangers, or I could not have spoken."

"So they were all strangers. If I had known you I think I should have been more cordial. But we shall not be strangers any longer. Fellow-citizens of the same household of faith ought not to be strangers but friends. I don't know how good a doctor you are, but I do know I never heard so powerful a sermon, and I have heard a good many."

"I hardly know what I said. The Spirit moved me to speak,—and then I thought it a pity for the people who had come so far, and from all quarters, to be disappointed. It is a joy to me to help bear the light to others. My own life was very dark before I found it. Now I count all my experiences as gain, no matter how adverse they may seem, humanly speaking."

"Do you count it gain that you are obliged to go away from here for want of practice?"

"I suppose it shows I have not found the right place. I believe God has some work for all of us to do, and a spot where to do it."

"What if you fail in Vinetown?"

"Then I shall go somewhere else."

"How many times will you have to fail as a doctor before you conclude you have mistaken your calling, and ought to have been a preacher?"

"I don't know that I shall ever think that. I can preach in my own quiet way while I attend to my practice. I never fail to drop a word of cheer into the heart of him who is appointed to die. I think a physician who believes in Jesus and the resurrection can do as much good as a minister."

"I don't know about it. People are not apt to receive religious counsel from a doctor, as they do from a minister. They generally look upon it as something out of his line entirely, and don't give his words any weight. I never say anything to my patients about their souls; though I confess there are times when I want to. When I see great anxiety and fear of death it is hard to hold my peace. I always feel like dissipating the phantoms, by telling the troubled soul that

death is really abolished by the light of immortality. But then I should have all the ministers after me, and after the patient, too, and very likely they would bring a new load of scarecrows, and so the last state of that man would be worse than the first, and, reasoning in this way, I hold my peace."

"I run the risk of all the scarecrows the priests can bring, and if they come round in my presence, I show them by a thrust from the sword of the Spirit, that they are shams, and not living truth."

"Well, I should think you might. You seem to know the Bible all by heart. But I am a new convert, and have not had time to study it much. It is terrible, though, when we stop to reflect upon it, the way the ministers use death and eternity to frighten people into the church. One would almost conclude sometimes, by hearing them talk that an upright life would be of no account at all, if this world was the end of us. Now, I have learned from weighing my experiences that it pays to do right. When I look over the past, it is not difficult to see what sort of actions have brought me peace and joy; and I am not mystified when I try to ascertain the occasions of unrest and unhappiness which I too often feel. Last night my conscience was not quite easy while you were preaching, and when I heard that you were going away, I thought my indifference was at the bottom of it, and I would come in and welcome you, though it is the eleventh hour."

"I thank you for the welcome, but it cannot alter my decision. I think Vinetown will be the place for me. I seem to turn toward it in a homesick way, as though there I should find rest."

"I hope you will find plenty of work, instead of rest, if you are determined to go."

"Oh, I did not mean by rest, inactivity ; but a settled and home-like feeling. When I was in Providence I had all I could do from the very first week. My success was unparalleled. But I was not contented, and stayed only a year. You will think me singular, I know, to leave a good city practice, and plunge into a new country. But something native to me revolted at the kind of life I must live, though it promised abundance and wide popularity."

"In my opinion you'll find no rest for the sole of your foot until you understand your peculiar fitness for the work of the ministry. There are always plenty of doctors, but preachers of the true faith are scarce. If I were young like you, I would throw my pill-bags to the dogs and go to curing sick souls."

"I think it better to hold on to the pill-bags. Being both soul and body I shall have to live, and the ministers I have been in the habit of seeing at father's looked as though they lived "of the gospel." This will not support me as an undissected man, though my real life is sustained by it, and amply, too ; it will not clothe me nor shelter me. I must have wool and cotton to wear, and boards and shingles to keep the storm out of my office, where, if it should gain admission, it might mix the medicines in a very unscientific way."

"I don't believe you realize the world's need, Sanford. But when you have practised as long as I have, you will learn that more persons suffer soul-sickness than ever have the ague or consumption. And the worst of it is, they suffer more intensely, when the

body is racked by disease and intimations of death are about them. There ought to be something done to change the tone of the pulpit. Almost all the religious instruction people get is on the subject of their soul's salvation in another world. And when they are sick, then they begin to worry, for fear they shall die and be damned. It takes a pretty skilful doctor to measure his calomel so that it will cure such complicated cases. I had an instance last summer, awful beyond description. You know Winters, the grocer?"

"I have seen him."

"Well, his wife was confined with her first child, and through some carelessness they let her take cold, which brought on fever. She became very sick, but I could have managed the case; I have cured hundreds sicker than she, if they had let her soul alone. She had never "experienced religion," and her folks thought she was going to die. Then they began to talk to her about dying in an unregenerate state. They sent for the minister, and between him and the deacon, and her pious relations, they kept up a howl in the house nearly the whole time. She grew excited and alarmed, and finally delirious. I saw she was going, but did not understand why my remedies all failed, until she lost her reason. Then I knew from her ravings it was because her mind was in torture, and Winters himself told me how it came about. It was terrible to hear her rave. She would scream out that hell was yawning at her feet, and the devil had hold of her trying to plunge her in. She would cling to the bedpost for help, and not five minutes before she died, she jumped out of bed, crying at the top of her voice that the

devil was after her. They lifted her and laid her back. Then she lay with clenched hands, screaming, 'Horror! horror! horror!'

"This awful agony continued, and the distress upon her face was appalling until she drew her very last breath. Then a smile like sunshine illumined her features, and lifting up her arms, she shouted in ecstasy 'O light! light! light!' and was gone.*

"They thought she 'experienced religion' in that moment. I think she saw through into the glory of eternity, and God, the universal Father, lit her dying smile."

"She was a real believer, Dr. Sales. We see in her agony the natural fruits of a conscientious acceptance of the doctrine of endless misery. The whole world would be maniacs if each man and woman believed it for themselves. And right here we have a work to do in freeing the mind from fear of this tormenting falsehood before we can begin to build the framework of a positive religion. Our ministry will have to work for years in clearing away the rubbish which obstructs the entrance of wholesome, vital truth. And so our sermons will be largely on the old themes of death and eternity, and the sweet graces and charities of human life will have to grow — if at all — without much outside help. These awful doctrines have been so long preached, and so widely accepted, that it will not be easy to uproot them. Not that many persons believe in endless hell for themselves; but they believe this cup to be the portion of five-sixths of the world, nevertheless. Now you see if the Christian pulpit had

* A fact.

preached morals instead of dogmas, such doctrines could never have gained a lodgment in any sane mind. Suppose you try to interpret the command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," and apply it to human action ; the doctrine of endless misery is instantly undermined, and topples down like a child's cob-house. But you never hear it enforced and applied. At least I never did, but all the sermons to which I listened through the impressible years of childhood had one tone and one aim, and that was, 'get religion, so as to escape endless hell.' "

"The cultivation of good works is a field left for us, you see. We must enforce the truth of one human brotherhood, and the love consequent upon such relationship."

"Yes ; but all the world will first ask us what of this awful endless misery we have had rung in our ears a life long, and all the passages which seem to favor it must be explained, and doubt cleared away, before any more vital truth can gain attention."

"Well, Sanford, I think you know how to clear and sow too, judging from last night's experiment. Now think of Winters' wife, and remember she is not the only one who has suffered, and will suffer from the torments of a false faith, and I'll take a new lease of life, and doctor all the sick folks in this region, and you shall convert them. But I must go ; two patients to visit to-night. Put on your hat and go with me."

And Wesley who was charmed with the cordiality and sympathy of the old man, went with him, greatly to his delight.

CHAPTER XII.

DELIVERANCE.

WHEN Mercy Ryder comprehended the meaning of the appearances about her, as she did when the minister came in, she began to cry. Her mother tried to hush her by telling her not to act like a baby on her wedding-day. Then turning to Elder Bradley, she said, "Mercy is not well, but we thought as the wedding-day was set, and her birthday too, we had better not put it off."

Then Dominie drew his chair up to her side, and told her that marriage was an ordinance of the Lord and that his Christian handmaid should enter into it with cheerfulness and resignation. The man whom she had chosen was of good repute among the servants of God, and it was right and proper that she should obey his desires in all things, for man is the head of the woman in the church. Then he said "let us pray," and all but Mercy knelt down. She did not seem inclined to speak or stir, but kept on crying; and by the time the prayer was ended, which was largely devoted to her "in her state of rebellion against the Lord and his ordinances," she was sobbing aloud, and uncontrollably. Dennis asked her if she felt a great deal sicker to-day, and if she did, why, she need not stand during the ceremony. The minister could marry

them just as well if she sat in her chair ; and without eliciting any reply from broken-hearted Mercy, he took his position by her side, and the ceremony began. When Mercy heard the first words of the service, "Do you take this woman to be your lawful wife?" she screamed, and reached her hands toward Susan imploringly. Susan seemed utterly indifferent. A look of despair came over Mercy's face, and she fell forward on the floor. The bride had swooned ; and before the bridegroom or the priest could stoop to lift her, another figure came between them, and Mercy was borne into the open air. Restoratives were instantly applied, and Susan was first to help ; and when Mercy opened her eyes she looked upon Wesley Sanford. She thought she had died, and awakened in heaven ; but when Wesley spoke, she knew it was not all heaven around her, though with him to lean upon, there would be everlasting rest in her heart. When he saw that she was really alive again, though at first he had feared it was too late to save her, he turned upon the house with the fury of a lion.

" Horace Ryder ! sleek hypocrite ! this is the way you serve the Lord, is it ? Sing and pray, and sacrifice your own child to Mammon ! And you, Isadore, have intercepted my letters, and written me lies, until you had nearly accomplished your scheme, and married your sister to a man for whom she cares not a straw. I advise you to have a prayer-meeting instantly, and let the priest lead who stands ready to be the tool of your mercenary ambition. Maybe God will pardon you on account of your littleness ; as for me, I must see hearty repentance before I forgive."

The wedding-guests sat in a state of stupefaction. Each one seemed transfixed by Wesley's stinging words. Horace himself was first to find his tongue. "The marriage was Mercy's own choice. There had been no coercion about it. The child was sick, and that was why she swooned. But as it was her birthday, they thought it best to have the ceremony performed. He trusted there would be no further intrusion, as Mercy was now better."

"O Wesley, take me away, where I can never see Dennis Canfield again."

"That is just what I intend to do. You have been persecuted as long as you will be. If I had known it all this would have ended years ago."

Whereupon Eunice too found her voice. "You are not going to take our Mercy away from a good home, and let her live in poverty."

"Mercy has decided that matter herself, and she is of age."

Eunice began to use her handkerchief freely. The shock of seeing and hearing Wesley Sanford so unexpectedly had been very severe upon her nerves.

Susan went up stairs, and John Smith followed her; she had given him a hint to do so. A trunk was pulled out from under the bed, and they dragged it down and placed it in Wesley's carriage. "I vow, Sue, I'm as glad of this as you are. But how in time did it come about?"

"I'll tell you, sometime."

"Didn't Den sneak off like a whipped puppy the minute he saw Wesley? Such a booby is not fit to marry an old cat."

Next, Mercy's bonnet and shawl were brought out to where she still sat under a tree at the rear of the house.

"Susan Rice, you had better go too," said Isadore. "We shall not want to see you after this."

"We can't spare Susan and Mercy both, Isadore. There's all the wool to spin."

"Better let the wool burn up than have her round after what she has done."

"Oh, I intend to go, Isadore. No matter about arguing the case. I shall not leave Mercy until she is well. Lucy Bright engaged to keep my school until it closes, if I want her to."

"Don't ever come back here again."

"I don't intend to. You may have my share of the linen, Isa, so cheer up."

And Wesley, who with John Smith's help, had fastened the trunk on behind, now lifted Mercy into the carriage, and Susan and himself sprang in after her, and they drove away.

Susan was no hinderance to the mutual explanations which Wesley and Mercy had to make of the long, intervening years. They felt a new tie binding them to the orphan girl, and Wesley promised her a home where she could act a little more independently than she had been able to do under the guardianship of the Ryders. She should have all she earned at school-teaching, and not be obliged to pay tithes, as she had done in the past.

When they arrived at their destination, and had leaped from the carriage in front of Dr. Sales' comfortable home, Mercy ran up the steps as though she

were really well, and it was not near "three days" yet. The doctor and his good wife waited in the door to meet them, and when the jolly old man had taken Mercy up in his arms as though she were a child, he ran with her into the parlor, and Wesley and Susan heard him say, "Dying of love, hey! Did you expect an old fellow like me to cure you of that? But didn't I send the right medicine, though? How red your cheeks are!"

"You make me blush, doctor."

But the doctor did not seem to care if he did. He went circling round the room with her, as though the romantic affair met his most hearty sympathy, and finally settled down in a deep arm-chair, still holding her in his lap.

"Don't, doctor, you make Miss Ryder ashamed," said his wife, who relished the doctor's jubilant mood, but thought she ought to speak on Mercy's account.

"It's just like a novel, Sanford. Say, are you going to send for the squire to-night? I have my boots on all ready to go."

"Not to-night, doctor. I'm afraid we should have unpleasant memories of our wedding-day, if we were married on the same day they came so near tying my little girl up to Den Canfield."

"But you'd remember a happy deliverance."

"I think Mercy will prefer to wait awhile in your fatherly care, and I will go on to Vinetown and establish myself,—have some place to live in before I am married."

"Suppose that baffled bridegroom finds out where she is, and comes down here clad in armor, and makes

a grand attack, what can gray hairs like mine do toward defending the castle?"

"Such an event is quite improbable, when we consider the stuff out of which the baffled bridegroom is made. He don't belong to the fighting class, or he would have knocked me out of the house to-day. Instead of that I only had one glimpse of him. Where he went, or how he disappeared so quickly, I cannot understand."

"But, Wesley, he is a very determined man, I think," said Susan. "He may not have much courage in presence of an enemy, but he is very persistent in his purposes. I shall not feel safe about Mercy until she is married."

"Shall we be married now, Mercy? I only thought of your good in the proposed waiting."

"Not now if you please, Wesley. I would rather be ready to go right to housekeeping first."

"Well, do as you like, my children. I keep two pistols, and a double-barrelled gun besides,—to kill game with, you know — but I shall look out and keep them loaded, and if I hear any uncommon noises in the night, like as not I shall shoot, and if poor Canfield should get killed, then this old neck would have to stretch, and wouldn't that be terrible after the honorable life I have lived?" said Dr. Sales in a mock gravity, which set them all laughing; and in the attitude of despair he was obliged to assume, Mercy found her freedom from his arms, and was allowed to lay aside her bonnet.

None of the party except Susan sympathized at all with his fears, which they hardly knew whether were

real or pretended with him; but she felt, as she said, a little unsafe about Mercy, and should until she saw her married to Dr. Sanford. However, the topic was changed and the evening passed away joyously. It was a rare privilege to this young couple, who had not met in more than six years, to sit down together under one roof, and talk without fear of molestation. The future looked very fair with promise, notwithstanding Wesley owned no large tract of land, and they had their way to make in the world. He hardly expected to find her rooted and grounded in the same precious faith, knowing the little chance she would have for help in her investigations, and the opposition she would meet at home, if she pursued them openly. But Mercy had been silent about her religious convictions. Usually she attended the Methodist meetings in the neighborhood with the rest of her family, and for a long time she had been specially labored with by the clergy and leaders, all to no avail. If they asked her whether she would like to have religion, she told them she thought she already had it. If they wanted her to start out at that very meeting to serve the Lord, she would inform them that she started long ago. She had some quiet answer to all their questions and suggestions, and, withal, she lived such a silent and blameless life, that some of the ministers were almost ready to believe she had been converted, and hesitated about joining the church out of an overwhelming sense of humility.

About the reading of the book Wesley had given her, and her own meditations, and the meeting in the grove, with its blessed influence, she told him, and he

listened with inexpressible joy. The knowledge that they were one in faith made the light in the future deepen till its brilliance seemed to reach down to the present and wrap his heart like the glory of heaven. There seemed little use now in going to Vinetown for rest. He should feel at home anywhere with such true sympathy to bless him. What more could he ask than the undisturbed presence of a faith ruling as king in the life out of sight, and one to share it with him and rejoice in his joy?

But the kind old doctor's practice should not be taken from him, nor should Vinetown be disappointed; and when he bade Mercy good-night, he was to start very early in the morning, before it would be prudent for her to rise, and they did not expect to meet again until they were ready to go to housekeeping. .

But I tell you they were as happy as kings.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW THE SNARE WAS BROKEN.

I SUPPOSE my readers have divined how it happened that Wesley Sanford was on the spot at the exact minute necessary to make the scene complete; but perhaps I ought to explain matters a little for fear there may be some boy or girl interested in my story who doesn't like hints but would prefer to have me tell all about it.

You remember that Susan, after she left Mercy in the woods, half vexed at her saintly talk, went to reading a newspaper somebody had given her, and forgot all about the girl. She did not realize how terribly Mercy was stricken, or understand her either when she ran off in such a pet, or she would never have left her to suffer alone. And because she did not understand she sat down to read, and before she got through with what was of interest, and turned the paper over to take a look at its general appearance, she had forgotten all about what Isadore had told her or where Mercy was. But something on the very first column of the first page brought her to her senses. It was a simple business advertisement, and read in this way: "Wesley Sanford, M. D. Office, No. 10 Main Street, C——, Ohio."

Instantly she caught her sun-bonnet and ran towards the woods, intending to tell Mercy the joyful news at the top of her voice. Indeed, she laughed aloud as she thought of her glorious errand. But as she ran a new idea came into her head. She would not tell Mercy that Wesley was so near, but write to him and tell him the whole story about her love and her persecutions. She thought, from words she had heard him drop, she could depend on John Smith to carry the letter. To be sure he might have forgotten all about the little schoolmate — might be married, for all she knew; but she did not believe it. She had too many times seen how tenderly he carried her over the drifts; and Charles had told her he “believed Wesley liked Mercy.” So when she reached the poor child there she was, almost dead to be sure, and it was hard to keep silence when she knew one word would change this gloom to gladness. But the thought of the fine scene she might bring about kept her romantic heart from jumping through her lips; though she really did not expect they would urge the marriage while Mercy was so sick.

On Sunday night she managed to write the letter, and was going to ask John if he would take it, as she knew he was going to the village for groceries the next day; but in the morning all the plans were changed. Mercy was sick enough to have a doctor. A fellow had come five miles to trade horses with John; so Canfield went for the doctor, and did the errands besides. Of course she could not send the letter by Canfield. Indeed, she had taken precious care of the paper, so that they would not find out her

secret. Now her only resort seemed to be the old doctor, and she was afraid he might not be Wesley's friend. She knew something about professional jealousies.

But when she had seen Dr. Sales's face she was not afraid to speak to him, and ran out to where he tied his horse for the purpose of doing it. The family would think she was making anxious inquiries about Mercy. She had watched the preparations, and found out that the wedding was going on anyhow. The hour was appointed and the guests and priest invited; and after this she had added a few lines to her letter.

"Doctor, what do you think of Miss Ryder?"

"She has some sort of trouble. I don't know any disease that makes people just in her condition."

"Doctor, she has. The family are forcing her to marry the man who came after you; and he is old enough to be her father. And she loves Wesley Sanford; they are old schoolmates. I have just found out he lives in C——."

"Good! She'll be well in three days."

"Do you know Mr. Sanford?"

"I know Dr. Sanford, and he is a capital fellow, too."

"Will you take this letter, and tell him, too, everything?"

"Won't I take the letter! And tell the story, too! Going to marry her to that old one, are they? No, they are not!" And Dr. Sales rode over the ten miles on a swifter pace than usual when the case was one of life and death. He had a very warm place in his heart for all the love affairs young folks trusted to

his keeping, and this one was specially interesting from the interest he felt in the subjects. He found Dr. Sanford in his office in much the same position as on the night previous — a great book before his big head.

“Here’s a letter for you, boy, brim full of honey and sunshine, and a sprinkling of heaven. And when you have read it I am ready to testify.”

Wesley read it like one groping through dense darkness into the light; then he started up and went towards the door.

“What now, Sanford! I hope you are not dazed or crazed either by news of such a wonderful wind-fall!”

“I’m going to Ryder’s *now*, this minute, to save that poor child from the serpents.”

“No! you’ll spoil a fine play. Wait until to-morrow; then dodge in at the proper time.”

“But I might wait too long.”

“Follow the Dominie, and then you can time it.”

“Is Bradley to marry them?”

“Didn’t Miss Rice say so in the letter? She told me so; and I guess she wrote it, too.”

“Yes, she does say so,” said Wesley, after looking at the letter. “But it would make an awful scene if I wait until the wedding; and I’m afraid I should *rave*! Do you know, doctor, my letters to this girl have been intercepted, and I thought she was married to Canfield long ago.”

“Well, she is not married to Canfield. And if you take my horse and carriage and trot on after Bradley, I don’t think she will be.”

"Suppose Bradley should start to-night, or go in the forenoon, and stop to dinner, then they might be married before the hour set, and five minutes would spoil two lives."

"He can't start to-night. Old Mr. Cole is to be buried at ten to-morrow, and he conducts the funeral."

"Are you *sure* of all this, Dr. Sales?"

"I'm sure about the funeral; but I did my best to save the old man. Suppose I had succeeded? Then Bradley might start some time when we did not know it, and," —

"Don't! doctor, I shall run mad!"

"Oh, no. Keep easy. It is all safe now."

And Dr. Sanford tried to keep easy, but it was hard work. He did not sleep a wink. The first thing he did in the morning was to walk by Bradley's house to see if the minister was anywhere about. He felt better when he saw him come out with a basket, and go to picking beans in the garden. Most of the time until ten he walked about the village, strolling through the graveyard, and other unfrequented and singular places. Then he went in to the funeral. Bradley was really there. But suppose it was not Bradley they said. Right in the midst of the services he pulled out his letter to assure himself. Somebody shoved his elbow. Then he put it up remembering where he was, and very much ashamed. Bradley rushed out as soon as the Amen had been fairly spoken. So did Dr. Sanford. His horse was harnessed. So was Dr. Sanford's. And not a minute was the old priest allowed to get out of sight of the excited young man until they reached Horace Ryder's

lane. Then Wesley let him go on to the house while he staid behind a clump of walnuts. When Bradley was fairly within the door Wesley drove down the lane and tied his horse not far from the minister's. Nobody saw him. They were engaged in the preliminaries. The priest was a little late. Indeed, so intent had Mr. B. himself been on thoughts of the uncommon occurrence of a wedding, and its helpful fee, that he had not discovered that he was pursued.

After Wesley was once at the door he thought it best to wait the conclusion of the prayer. His reverence prompted this. Then he began to appreciate the play and dropped in at the nick of time.

He told Dr. Sales he *did* rave; but I think he was cool considering his provocation. A little wholesome truth hurled into the ears of those who have acted a false part may be of salutary influence. It is needed sometimes in the moral atmosphere, as really as are storms and tornadoes in the physical; and the man who sends it on its errand must himself be a moral hero. The same voice which said on Calvary's cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," said also, "Wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees! Hypocrites!" And he who could pray for others as well as rebuke boldly their iniquity, could walk to martyrdom himself without a murmur over his own pains.

Wesley Sanford calculated to do his part in life without complaining, though another less worthy shared the joy which he had hoped for. Indeed, I think he purposed a course of living martyrdom when he went within ten miles of the home of Horace

Ryder, believing as he did that Mercy was married. He would build up his soul in all strength and fortitude, though no earthly eye saw the struggle; and live like a monk, isolated from human sympathy. In this inner cloister he would gather strength to help the weak and despairing among whom his profession called him to labor.

But when he learned that the girl he loved suffered and pined, and was falling into devouring flames, the giant who could endure all things for himself could strike heavily for the release of another. His strong resolves of self-abnegation were broken like withes, and he would help her to happiness and himself by the same act, deeming this course no less righteous than the one he had expected to pursue.

If Susan Rice had known the secrets of the house which she called home, she need not have hidden the newspaper so very carefully. They knew Wesley Sanford's name was on a doorpost in C—— long before she knew it. Dennis had seen it, and so had Horace Ryder before the imperative plan was formed. The fact of the name being visible lay at the bottom of the plan. The time had come when delays were dangerous. And so Mercy was bidden to set the wheel away and sew on linen; and make a dress of her own, which had been selected for her by Isadore, because of a certain sign which they knew she would be sure to see if she went to the village.

CHAPTER XIV.

SAINT RACHEL.

SIX or seven years had brought few changes to the Sanfords, who remained on the Susquehanna, save those which time naturally causes. Charles had learned all he could at the Academy, and now was himself a teacher during the winter season, the time of the farmer's holiday. He was full of hope, and ambitious of a successful life. But to him, success was measured by different estimates than to his brother Wesley. One thought a successful life consisted in superior mental attainments, and an intellectual kingship among his fellows. Charles would be thought the smartest and wisest man of his neighborhood, so that men would look up to him, and be obliged to come to him for solution of all their knotty questions. His idea of "greatest" was the man who knew most of books, and whose knowledge was appreciated among those about him, so that he was sought after deferentially on account of the help he could render. This to him was the climax of a human life.

Wesley desired greatness of a different kind. Indeed he never thought of greatness of any kind; never estimated life in that way, but aimed to attain a consecrated will, a devotion to the cause of humanity. His highest ideal of man was that of helper indeed,

but helper of moral infirmities rather than intellectual aspirations. He was not at all self-conscious, but oblivious even of his own good works. He did not desire praise, or to be known as worthy of praise, but to do his part quietly, and have all the joy in that inner life, where his purposes and plans were formed in the atmosphere of reverent reliance upon the Highest. Charles aimed to be a king. Wesley chose the position of servant. How life realized these widely different estimates I trust this story may make manifest. Whether the intellect, unsanctified by a consecrated purpose, is of itself sufficient to reach the goal of its ambition, will be seen in the career of brilliant Charles Sanford, the genius and scholar. And whether the life of a servant is honorable; since the Master lived that life, we might all be ready with our "Yea," and "Amen," without realizing its divineness when one of our own kin lives it; and so we will follow Wesley, a man among men, and see where his chosen path will lead.

Rachel Sanford felt a degree of pride in the good start which her two sons were ready to make in life. She was not blind to the promise of Charles, and yet when the old family Bible was taken down from the swinging-shelf beside the chimney, she could not help feeling that he joined in the evening prayer out of habit, and not because his soul prayed. He thought he had no needs reaching out into the realm of mystery. He cared only for scholastic knowledge, and was not troubled with questions about himself or the hereafter. And yet if Rachel had been able to see a consciousness of spiritual need, and a reliance upon God,

in promising Charles, she would have felt safer about the boy. As it was, she could only hope and pray that his superior intellect would pass life's rocks and quicksands safely — that his knowledge of books would help him in the midst of peril, until the life within should reach out its conscious arms and lead him over a secure path. Not that she knew the boy to be wayward or in any uncommon danger. But she was aware that intellects so keenly strung are in greater peril than the obtuse and sluggish mind can appreciate or experience. Her quick insight into human character gave her this knowledge, and observation had confirmed it. And so if in her heart she prayed for him with a yearning she never felt for Wesley, it is plain that she felt safe about Wesley, because she knew he leaned not on his own strength alone.

Another phase of Charles' life disturbed his reflective mother. He was never at rest. Now this is, in part, common to all men, this looking forward, and reaching after an unattained good. But no earthly gain seemed to satiate in the least, Charles' ambition. Once he looked forward to the time when he should know as much as John Irons, and thought he should ask nothing more. But now that the book knowledge of this wise old man was really his, he was not easy, but longed for his years and experience, thinking they would bring the fulness which he craved. When he was able to teach, the neighborhood school, which embraced all ages and all grades of advancement, without even the shadow of a fear of being "balked," he looked forward to a professorship, and repined at the decision which would disappoint that desire, by keeping him

ties to a small farm and the prospective care of aged parents. This restless spirit was likely to overturn the maturest purposes, and set him going headlong one day after an object which he had not dreamed of the day before. Farming was not his special business or desire, and yet his parents were quite astonished one day at the dinner-table, to hear him advocate the propriety of selling out and going where land was cheap in order to increase their acres. When Loudon demurred at the thought of "pulling up stakes" at his time of life, Charles said a man never could be anybody on fifty acres of land, and if he farmed at all, he wanted at least a hundred, and he would not object to having five hundred, if he was able to buy so large a tract. So this evidence of unrest was a little secret trouble to Rachel, who had planted a willow in the village grave-yard, and wanted to sleep nowhere else but there.

Thomas Jones made a severe effort to pay up Horace Ryder when that gentleman moved West, and in being obliged to raise so much money all at once, he got into a strait where he had to sell his little farm at something of a sacrifice, and as he had too little left to start again in the old neighborhood, he too, tried emigration in a covered wagon, with Mary, his wife, and not a chick or a child to plague or help them. There seemed a great void in the place when they went away. There was such an honest, hearty life about them, that all unpurged souls were happier for their nearness, and Rachel Sanford, who trusted her intuitions to define a worthy soul, missed a friend when Mary went away. But the church prospered, and her

fellowship there was undisturbed, and besides she was a woman who was never alone. Her mind and heart were too well stored for that. If all the neighbors had emigrated, and the church with them, she would have found companionship, and a great measure of peace. But Rachel Sanford was ripening for eternity. More than sixty winters, with their frost and snow, had witnessed the overflowing garner of a life which had gathered ripeness with the years. She knew not that the peace and rest in which she lived were the intimations of a call to come up higher. Yet He who counts our hairs had looked upon this woman with a Father's pity, and sealed her fate from the sad eyes of future years. In the midst of hope, when there was more sunshine than shadow in thought of her boys, there was a knock at the door as of a messenger unseen, and then there were hushed voices in the house, and creeping steps as they watched by her couch of sickness, and thought their mortal care and love could avert the arrow of the angel's quiver.

Only one wish remained unanswered in the heart of this dying woman. She would see again Wesley, her first-born. And Wesley, in the midst of preparations for his wedding — when he was fitting the nest for the dove Mercy, and the vines along the Alleghany were heavy with purple clusters, and the air of Autumn crisp with frost, and bright with sunshine — felt the frost coming into his heart's sunshine, and the grapes of his love pressed as in the wine-vat; and instead of wine, his heart almost ran blood, when he heard that his mother, whom he almost idolized, was dying, and calling for him. He shut the door of his little home,

and turned the key in the lock. He left his half a hundred ague patients with a chill colder than theirs, and so he could leave them without pity. There was no whistle of locomotive to help his impatient spirit; but instead, he went the weary way on horseback, and feared, before his fleet gray could measure three hundred miles of distance, the curtain might fall between his mother's wish and its ready answer. But not so did the good God deal with his servant, Rachel. She lived to see her first-born, and read the lines of a consecrated purpose upon his noble face, and lay her mother-hand upon his head. And with him alone, she cried to God for guidance and blessing upon Charles, the younger, and charged Wesley to counsel and help him to understand that life holds more treasures than can be unlocked by the intellect. Wesley promised to do a brother's part by Charles, and open his new house to his father; and then Rachel felt full of rest. She had wondered how they would live when her guiding hand was still; but now that was all plain, and there was nothing to look back upon. So she lived in hope, and looked forward and upward, and when a month later, they bore her to her rest under the willow, the neighbors said her face was as though light from heaven shone on it and she was looking at angels. The noblest of her sex had been taken, and many tears fell with the early snow upon her grave; and even those who had not known, nor understood her in life, gathered at her funeral, and mourned with the three lone men, and the bereaved neighbors. And the ministers who had sat at her feet as learners, when they heard that Rachel Sanford was dead, made mention of

her excellence in their churches, and held up her name for an example.

But most of all was she mourned in the heart of her first-born. Even her husband did not feel the extremity of sorrow, nor the great void which Wesley felt; for the boy had his mother's nature, and was a part of herself in a sense. He missed the wise counsellor by word and pen, and treasured all she had ever said or written to him as a voice from diviner spheres. And when he took up his lonely way back to Vine-town, he feared that his life might lose its enthusiasm of work, without the inspiration of a mother's love, and the hope of doing well in honor of her counsel. The promise that his father and Charles would follow him as soon as the small farm could be sold, did not lift the burden of loneliness from his heart; and the prospect of a new home, with Mercy to brighten it, was dimmer, because his mother could not participate in his joy. But this sorrow did not sour him—it only sanctified; and forevermore, the saintliest saint in the calendar of memory was Saint Rachel, his mother. And when he took up life's work among the sick of the village, he found the thought of her no less an inspiring presence than when she walked the earth; and heaven seemed vastly nearer than Otsego.

It had been some time since any news had come from the little household at Dr. Sales. In fact Wesley had heard nothing since he left to visit his dying mother. The last letter from Mercy he had answered promptly, expecting to hear from her at least once during his absence. But he had not heard, and as soon as the shock of sorrow was a little softened by time, and he

had turned his thoughts upon this long silence, he was disturbed that it was so very long, and had become so almost unconsciously to himself. The condition of the roads was such as to preclude the possibility of a ride to C——. Then his horse was jaded, and this, with the January thaw, made his reflections more and more unpleasant, because he could not instantly solve the mysterious silence and find out the truth. He waited for the helpful frost, but it seemed to him it would never come. The very foundations of the earth seemed softened and ready to fall out. And while he waited, no answer came to the letter he had despatched as soon as he came to himself. Really the conditions were a little ominous to this young man who had suffered so much before because his letters were not answered. How he prayed for a bridge of ice over the Alleghany, and a standing-place for Gray on the highway! But the Alleghany rippled on, its face a burnished mirror, and while sunshine glassed it the ice could not. So Wesley had to wait.

CHAPTER XV.

LOVE'S DEFIANCE.

BY the help of Dr. Sales, who was one of the first men in the village, Susan Rice found immediate work as teacher of a select school. "Private Schools" they are called in New England, but that is not the correct term for the latitude and age of our story. If a few neighbors saw fit to hire a teacher, and pay the bill out of their own pockets, that teacher had the honor of teaching a select school. Susan was not much lifted up by the honor of her position, but the opportunity for remunerative work was joyfully accepted, and a good many thanks were showered on Dr. Sales for his successful influence. She did not "board round," as is the custom to this day in the country of Ohio and Pennsylvania, but lived at the doctor's, and did what she could to make Mercy happy away from home, and Wesley, too. If any thing was lacking in her efforts, the doctor himself with his ready humor made up the deficiency. And so between them there seemed little chance for gloom, though it was a sad experience to conscientious Mercy, having any differences come between her and her parents. She longed for their forgiveness and benediction.

One day the carriage of Solomon Flint stopped at the door, and his sister Miranda, who thought herself an invalid, came in to consult the doctor. Her appearance was unexpected, and she was ushered into the same room where Mercy was sewing.

"What! are you here, Mercy?" exclaimed Miss Flint. "I thought your husband had moved off — away down to the Alleghany."

"My husband?" said innocent Mercy.

"Why, yes; Wesley Sanford, to be sure. Ain't he your husband? If he ain't, I think he ought to be, after taking you off the way he did."

"We are not married yet," said foolish Mercy.

"Not married! That's a scandal. Why didn't you make him marry ye that very day? Like as not he wants ye for dissection. Doctors are awful creatures. And so you ain't married yet? Well, I guess your mother would take on worse than she does, if she knew that."

"I don't know why mother should feel bad about it. We shall be married as soon as Wesley gets a house. I wanted to wait till then."

"Humph!" grunted Miranda; and just here the door opened; and the doctor came in from his office.

"Well, Miss Flint; sick yet? I thought you'd be as good as new by this time."

"I am no better at all, doctor."

The doctor examined her, and seemed disposed to dispute her word. She could not deceive him by her long-faced pretensions. He had a mind to give her a dose that would keep her sick for the next three months. But on reflection, he concluded that Mrs.

Sales had as much care now as she ought to have, and only a raw girl. If the girl had been anything but raw, Miss Flint would have found her reception in his office instead of the family sitting-room. As it was, he prescribed some simple thing, and told her to take it precisely at three o'clock that afternoon. She looked at the clock and thought she should have to hurry; but she could not go without inquiring the whereabouts of Susan Rice.

"Susan Rice!" said the doctor, with an ominous shake of the head. "It is singular you have not heard about Susan."

"What, doctor! Has *she* run off with Wesley Sanford?"

"How *did* you happen to guess that, Miranda?"

"I never had any too good an opinion of Susan, if she is a minister's daughter. It's just what I expected of her."

The doctor looked at Mercy and shook his head, and Miranda Flint drove off about five minutes before Susan came in to dinner.

"What made you leave that impression with Miranda, doctor?"

"Oh, I have just heard that they mean to get her back, and make a slave of her again at Ryder's, — excuse me, your father's; and I mean to hide the child if possible till that delinquent takes you both to Vinetown."

"I'm afraid the cover you put over Susan will leave me a little too much exposed, Doctor Sales."

"I'll take care of you. Susan has to go back and forth to school and might be kidnapped. You have

no such danger." And Susan's face at the door, covered, as it usually was with sunshine and hope, put an end to the talk about herself; but she and Mercy had a long conference before they slept that night.

Miranda Flint forgot to take her medicine at three o'clock, but at that precise hour she might have been seen at Horace Ryder's, in the presence of Mrs. Horace herself and Isadore, whom she had taken in on the way, and there she related the astounding intelligence that Susan Rice was married to Wesley Sanford — that she had no doubt it was Susan he wanted all the time. Isadore knew better than this, for she had read Wesley's letters, and thought if Susan had gone with him it was to get the house ready as Mercy was not well, but she said nothing, preferring to let Miranda's view of the case make its impression upon her mother. Mrs. Ryder was thunderstruck at first. Afterwards she was pleased. She began to see that it was yet possible to count Dennis Canfield's acres as a part of one estate, and Dennis as a pretty tolerable appendage that would not always hang to the land. The horn blew for an early supper that night, and Horace came in to meet a face wreathed in smiles as sweet as he had seen twenty-five years ago.

"Oh, Horace, I have charming news. Our Mercy is not married to Wesley, but Susan is, and Mercy is no doubt pining to come home."

"Is that so!" exclaimed astonished Horace. "Then we must go right after her. It is too bad you have had all the wool to spin alone, wife, when you have carried the burden and heat of the day. I'll go right over and get Mercy to-morrow. And no doubt she'll be glad to marry Canfield now."

Dr. Sales brought a letter from the office for Susan Rice, and handed it to Mercy for safe-keeping until Susan should return to dinner. Mercy looked at it with its familiar post-mark and thought of the long years, when she was hungry for letters and none came; and it seemed too bad that Susan should wait until dinner-time, before this one could be devoured. She felt quite sure those flourishes and graceful curves were made by the hand of Charles Sanford, and if they were, most likely Susan would be interested in hearing from the one who helped her do the hard sums. She put on her bonnet and went to the school-house without mentioning her purpose to any of the family. It was not far, and she had often been there, but the talk of Dr. Sales the day before, and her long conference with Susan, had made her feel a little unsafe, and she walked faster than was her wont. Susan was surprised to see her at the door after their conclusion that she ought to keep entirely within the doctor's enclosure for the present, and urged her to stay until noon, that they might walk home together. But she feared she might embarrass the scholars in their recitations, remembering how she used to stumble when visitors came in, and thought it best to run home.

"But wait and hear the news in my letter, Mercy."

The letter was read in the school-house entry, and it told of continued prosperity to Charles Sanford—a steady climbing of the intellectual ladder, round by round. He was going to be assistant in the Academy, with higher pay than a district school afforded; and the object of the letter seemed to be an inquiry concerning the prospects for teachers in the West. Su-

san's face visibly brightened and she let Mercy go without farther remonstrance. She had hardly turned away from the school-house door when her father's well-known one-horse wagon was seen only a few rods in the distance, and coming directly towards her. Her first impulse was to dodge out of sight. But that was impossible, as there was no lane or hiding-place accessible. Besides, she knew it was easy for her father to recognize her, and no doubt he had on the instant. While she was trying to think what to do the horse had trotted over the few rods, and stopped close by her side.

"Mercy, my dear child, I am overjoyed to see you. Until yesterday we thought you had moved off where we could never look upon our dear child any more. Come right up into the wagon and let me carry you where you are going." And Horace Ryder reached his hand, and Mercy took it, and climbed up by his side.

"Is mother well and Isadore?"

"Yes, we are all well and dying to see you. Come right home now that you have been so terribly disappointed in Wesley, and cheer the hearts of your parents."

"I have not been disappointed in Wesley, father. I am only waiting until he gets ready, and then we shall be married."

"Miranda Flint says he is married to Susan."

"That is not true, father."

"If Susan went off with him, very likely they are married, or worse."

"They are not married, and never will be. It is a mistake of Miranda's."

"Well, if she's just gone with him to help get ready, you are enough better off at home."

"I never want to see Dennis Canfield again, father."

"As for that, you won't. He has gone 'down country' to be gone all winter. We think he has gone after a wife."

"Then if you are willing I should marry Wesley I will go. I should feel happier to have you all pleased about it."

"Do just as you like, child. He has a good profession and I make no doubt he can support you."

"Let us drive to Dr. Sales' and get my clothes, and tell them about it."

"There won't be room for your trunk. I must take in a grist; and the roads are not very good. We can send for your things any time."

"But they ought to know, father."

"The doctor is up our way almost every day, and he won't be long in finding it out."

Horace Ryder did not like the idea of rendering an account to anybody for taking his own daughter, and so drove on without stopping at the doctor's. It had been his purpose when he left home to go right there and lay the matter before the house. But he had reflected somewhat in driving the ten miles, and began to feel sure if Dr. Sales himself should be at home Mercy might not come. Very likely the doctor knew something about the past; and before his arrival in C—— his courage had entirely failed him, and he had concluded to drive home without the girl, and would have done so but for the accidental meeting. Now the way was very fair, and as for the clothes they could be obtained another day.

Mercy was received with great demonstrations by her mother and Isadore, and heartily commiserated because of her disappointment, until they were assured that Miranda was quite mistaken in that, and there was no disappointment in the case. Then they seemed to coincide with Mercy's plans and opinions, and stand ready to help her in all her little arrangements. If she ran down the lane with a letter for some good neighbor to carry to the office, some of the family protested against asking others for such little courtesies when so many of her own kin stood ready to do her bidding, and the neighbor was met somewhere between the lane gate and the post-office door, and kindly invited to deliver up the incendiary document.

Dennis had really gone "down country," and it seemed to be the general impression that he had gone after a wife. For the space of a few weeks Mercy breathed freely in her own home, and really credited the appearances about her as genuine. Dr. Sales had driven there as furious as a lion, suspecting her exact whereabouts on the very day of her disappearance. But when he was made acquainted with all the circumstances of the case, especially the absence of Canfield, he tried to calm himself and feel easy. Had it been Susan, with her resolute will, they were trying to trap, he would have rested in firmer faith; but Mercy was so sweet and yielding and tender he wished his own roof protected her. Wesley's letters were promptly forwarded, and Mercy thought he must be very busy with the ague patients and the new house to write her only two letters, and those so long ago. But she kept on encouraging him with sweet prom-

ises of how much she would help him when she came to Vinetown to live. And he, as we have seen, was in a furious fever because he did not hear.

Regularly at Horace Ryder's prayers were said, and Mercy kneeled down with the rest, and thought all was fair where such devotion abode. And one night just as they rose from their knees Dennis Canfield came in, and no wife was with him. Then Mercy's heart choked her, for he had come sooner than they said, and what if Isadore had written again! And when he came and told her that he went after a wife, but would not marry the queen of the world if he could have her as well as not, when Mercy Ryder had no husband, she knew that somebody had meddled or he would have thought with the rest that she had a husband. Then she wondered what in the world she should do. The new doctor at the new village had taken a large part of Dr. Sales' practice, and it was seldom he came to the neighborhood now, though she remembered her father had said he was there every day or two. The very next Sunday after Canfield's arrival there was to be a meeting in her father's own house, and Mercy was in terror for fear it was all planned again. She had wondered a little over the appointment of the meeting, for the Methodists had a comfortable place of worship at the Centre—the new village. And when Dennis came her wonder changed to fear. She got ready to go to Isadore's one day just at evening, thinking maybe that John would come home with her, and she could ask his counsel. But Isadore had grown so very sisterly she walked the way, too, with Mercy, and this plan had an end. She wrote to Susan

and started to carry it to the office herself, but was assured by her father that the roads were impassable — she could not possibly walk, and if she wanted anything at the village, he would ride over on horseback and get it cheerfully. So she gave him the letter, thinking that he would surely have no objections in carrying a letter to the office for Susan. But as Horace splashed through the mud he thought, whether Susan Rice was at Dr. Sales' or in Vinetown with Wesley Sanford, it was better she should have no communication with his daughter Mercy. So he read the letter deliberately, and found out that Mercy suspected the occasion of the meeting. Then he rode home with very doleful news, indeed. Dr. Sanford of Vinetown had run away, bag and baggage, and left his patients without so much as telling them where to get another doctor! It was a month since he went, and nobody had heard a word from him! The foundation for this story lay in a letter which Horace found at the office, dated in Otsego, and addressed to Mercy. It was written by the young man as he sat in his mother's sick-room, and to assure Mercy of the benediction of that saintly woman upon their contemplated union. And this is the use that was made of the tenderest phase of human love — when it is softened and sanctified by the presence of death.

"And now, Mercy," said Horace, "after that man has disgraced himself as he has, it is worse than folly for you to cling to him."

"How did you hear it, father?"

"I have a letter telling the whole story."

"Let me see the letter," and Mercy held out her hand.

"I can't let you see it. The developments are too bad ; it is enough for you to know the bare facts. And now, I think your infatuation ought to come to an end. Here is as fine a chance to settle in life as ever a girl had ; and it is renewed, too, after the most cutting refusal ; and if you decline now to receive it, remember I shall disown and disinherit you. Dennis Canfield loves you, and is ready to take you. There will be an opportunity for the ceremony next Sunday, at the meeting here, and nobody to come with their hypocritical interference, and after all the scandal about Wesley, and your running off with him, you will do well to have this indorsement from an honorable and wealthy man ; and there must be no further woman's nonsense about it."

"Let me see the letter, father. I can bear it, if it is hard."

"It is not fit for you to see," and Horace dropped it into the blazing fire, which could not lick it with tongues of flame without a measure of transfiguration, and Mercy's agonizing look caught her own name, coupled with endearing words ; then she went up stairs and sat down alone. After an hour of serious meditation, Mercy Ryder rose up, and walked the room with a firm and independent step, and a strength girding her about which she had never felt before. It was the martyr spirit which inspired her, but she would not be a martyr in an unholy cause. She was ready to do, and dare, and die in defence of her love for Wesley Sanford, and she would before it should be dishonored.

As the night gathered, she disrobed, and sought her

pillow. Her mother came up with tender inquiries after her health, thinking she must be sick because she did not come down to supper. Mercy assured her she was not sick, and Eunice told her not to worry about the disgrace to Wesley. It would be a great deal better for her to marry Canfield, and for her part she was glad he had "showed out beforehand." Then, as Mercy did not seem inclined to talk, she left her.

When the house was still and dark with midnight, Mercy crept noiselessly out of bed, and put on her warmest clothes, for the air had changed, and the January thaw was coming to an end. Then she went to the door of her room, and found it locked. This was an unexpected impediment. She knew not before that she was kept as a prisoner; but her door had been locked every night, nevertheless. Then she thought a minute, and tied the sheets together for a rope, with one end around her bedpost, which stood near the window. She made some noise in trying to loosen the frozen window. This set her heart thumping very loud. She listened but heard nothing. Then she began her descent, which was much easier than she expected, until she arrived at the end of the last sheet, which left her swinging at some distance from the ground. But Mercy was used to scaling fences, so she gave a leap into the darkness, and landed safely without any severe shock. Then she took the road toward C—, and wondering if she could possibly walk ten miles before morning.

While she was hurrying on over the frozen ground, she heard the sound of wagon-wheels. This terrified her. She had not reckoned on seeing anybody at that

time of night, and in such a quiet region. They came nearer, and she climbed the road-side fence and hid behind some bushes. Presently, several vehicles passed, evidently occupied by a party of young people, who had danced until midnight at the village inn. When the sound of their jollity receded, Mercy went on, wondering how any young people could laugh as they did. It was not possible they had ever suffered as she was suffering, in fear and doubt of those who should be our rock of defence and our guardian fortress. After awhile she thought she had walked far enough to reach the village, which she desired to avoid if possible by a circuitous route through the fields. But no village made its appearance, and the woods and the fields looked strange. She walked on, a little nervous at the signs of unfamiliarity about her, and before she thought it possible the night had passed, day dawned with a gleam of light, which clouds soon shadowed, and presently all the air was dim with storm. Then Mercy looked for shelter. She was beginning to think it would be wicked to expose her life to this pelting snow when Wesley loved her; and a trim log-house, whose windows showed a glimmer of candle-light between the parted cotton curtains, looked as though there might be room for one more, so she turned in at the gate made of peeled saplings, and rapped with her little knuckles, as primitive people have to do when they want admittance. A resonant voice pronounced the welcome words, and Mercy lifted the latch with a hurried motion, and soon looked to see if the face answered at all to the resonant voice. It did. And while the pair, sitting at their breakfast board, looked blank as

tonishment, Mercy ran toward them, calling in tones of ecstasy the names of Thomas and Mary Jones.

"Well!" exclaimed the host; "if it were a possible thing, I should say this was Mercy Ryder. But I don't quite see how you ever found us out. We meant to keep clear of Horace and his mortgages for the rest of our lives."

"Oh, Mr. Jones, I am not to blame for what my father does."

"Sure enough. And I'm not the man to blame you. So take off your outside coat, and have a hot dodger, and then, may be, you'll tell us all about it."

"I'll tell you before I rest, that I started at midnight to go to Dr. Sales', in C—., and I guess I have lost my way, and I am very tired."

"I should think you might be tired. If I know where the Ryder plantation is located, and I think I do, you've walked fifteen miles."

"Where am I then? I have not seen any town like C—."

"Of course you have not. You are as far from C—., as you are from Horace Ryder's; on the very borders of Palestine! Why didn't your father carry you, and go by daylight?"

"I am going to tell you everything. I know you will be my friends."

And Mercy told everything. And the hearty pledges of Thomas and Mary Jones were very refreshing, and no doubt, this providential guidance would be better than her own intent. So she thought, and it rested her.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HINDERING ELEMENTS.

WHEN Horace Ryder went to the barn to feed his cattle in the morning, something ghostly-white streamed down the end of his red house. At first he thought it must be snow, but on second thought he knew the snow could not cling to the house in that shape. He kept on carrying about the "locks" of hay until each cow, and ox, and yearling had received its portion, every now and then looking over his shoulder toward the ghost. The oftener he looked the more it seemed a ghost, and by the time the "chores" were done he was too much frightened to look at that particular spot while returning to the house. He called his wife, and told her there were some strange appearances at the end of the house, and she had better go up stairs and look out of the window and see what had caused them. Eunice went trembling up stairs. When she had turned the key in the door of Mercy's room she was afraid to open it. She called for Horace, who came up because he was called, but he, too, came trembling, notwithstanding he was not a woman. Then the door was opened a little way, and they both looked in. There was Mercy's room in terrible disorder, but no Mercy. Eunice groaned. She suspected murder. But

Horace, when he saw the open window into which the snow was flying, did not tremble so much. He began to guess the ghost was a pair of sheets. He crept forward somewhat cautiously and soon ascertained the truth.

"That's what it is. Mercy has gone off. And she can go. I have done with her," said this father.

"Well, Horace, I don't know but you are right. If Mercy will run away from such a home as she has here let her live in poverty. We are not to blame. We have done everything we could for her. She might have been mistress of four hundred acres of land just as well as not, and she wouldn't."

They looked out, but saw no tracks. The snow was falling in a way to obliterate them in a minute of time; and no knowing when she started — "and no matter," said Horace; "let us go down to breakfast."

Canfield came in from feeding his herd, and he had seen the shadowy ghost under Mercy's window. He went up to it, and touched it, and it did not vanish, but his hope did, and his visage grew very long; so they ate breakfast without any words; the Ryders, hating to break the news, and Canfield dreading lest they should. Really this bachelor had a tender side toward Mercy, and when he went out in the storm and rode away on his best horse they let him go, and said nothing. "What if little Mercy should die in the storm!" he thought, as he rode abreast its fierceness. He would find her if he could, and then there should be peace between them forevermore. This night-flight had opened his eyes. The Ryders had always told him it was Mercy's modest way, and not any dislike of

him, but he thought she would not go out and face death to escape him, if she was willing to be his wife. It would be giving up a great deal — a hope which he had cherished a good many years; but he could do it now. He went on as fast as he could, for the snow was drifting terribly, and besides, the Lake winds cut his shaven cheeks, and lanced his thin sides. Toward noon he stopped at Dr. Sales', and inquired for Mercy. The doctor and Susan were almost wild when they learned that she had left the house. This storm might freeze her if she did not seek shelter. And she was not there, where alone she could hope to find friends. When Dennis saw their alarm, he too trembled more and more for Mercy, and thought if she should be found dead he would be a branded Cain for the rest of his days. Taking out a little slip of paper he wrote something on it, and folding it carefully, gave it to Susan and went away, though they pressed him to take dinner, which was all ready.

When he was gone, Susan opened the paper and read: "I relinquish all claims to Mercy Ryder, and promise before God and witnesses never to trouble her any more;" and as she remembered the heavy look on his face, she was ready to cry in sympathy with his broken-hearted words.

Dennis did not come in until late at night, and the Ryders, being somewhat troubled, sat up for him. They asked no questions, but he told them he had found nothing of Mercy, though he had looked carefully along the road and in some of the woods and fields, and he was afraid she was dead.

The next day was Sunday, and the meeting came

off at Ryder's, though it was very thin on account of the storm. The wedding too, came off, and when the minister pronounced Dennis Canfield and Miranda Flint husband and wife Canfield requested him to be sure and publish the marriage in all the papers in that region, and gave him double fee for this extra labor. The witnesses did not know why he wanted all this notice but he did. If Mercy was alive she might see it, and then she would find rest. The slumbering spark of manhood in Dennis Canfield had been lit to flame at the evidence before him that Mercy preferred death to marriage with him. He did not want Mercy to die.

The storm spent its fury in three days and left the roads piled high with drifts. Then, before they were broken so as to be tolerably passable, the sun came out warm and bright, and the drifts melted, and stages, and even horsemen, were stayed in their journeys. The mail-bags, though bearing never so important messages, could not be transported, and if any heart was anxious it had to consider and endure. Wesley Sanford's letter of inquiry addressed directly to Dr. Sales had been three weeks in going less than one hundred miles. And Wesley, though he knew his own gray could not travel at such a time, almost blamed the mail-carriers for not forcing their horses through. Steady and calm as he usually was, this long silence which he had found it impossible to break by letters addressed to Mercy Ryder was wearing upon his nerves. Day by day he watched the condition of the roads almost despairingly as he rode about among the sick of the vicinity, and day by day he waited for

news. At last, when the kindly earth had partially absorbed the snow, and the frost was busy with the rest, he started for C——, and in three days had picked his way to the hospitable door of Dr. Sales. That very evening the tardy letter had been read by the old doctor, and as he took in the iniquity which had so long victimized young Sanford, he felt like making a public example of the whole race of Ryders, of whom Mercy seemed not to be in any sense a member. The entrance of Wesley in the midst of his unpleasant reflections did not soften the mental atmosphere of Dr. Sales. As he looked upon him and read the lines which trouble and anxiety had written since he last saw his face, the intrigue and deception which lay at the bottom of this change, looked more and more hideous. The old man had to give vent to his feelings; the fire would blaze out.

“I take it all back, Sanford, that advice I gave you about turning priest. If I were you I would turn hangman until that nest of hypocrites was exterminated.”

“What — what is it?” gasped Wesley. His first thought was of Mercy? Had she changed?

“O, you have not heard a word of the new developments, have you?” and then the doctor told him all. When he knew of Mercy’s disappearance, a sudden faintness seized the strong man — he feared she was dead. He knew that behind Mercy’s quiet exterior was abundant strength for any purpose, when once she was aroused by the presence of great danger. And after knowing that her old schoolmate had been true through the years, he did not believe she would let

anything but death divide them. She would hardly doubt again.

"But what shall be done? Has there been no advertisement of Miss Ryder's disappearance?"

"None that I know of. I thought you would not favor such publicity, and I kept silent; and of course her folks would hold their peace."

"I fear she perished in the storm. She might have become sleepy with the cold, you know. What shall be done?"

"I hope she is safe in somebody's house. But she is not in any one on the road between here and her father's. I took the very first day in which it was possible to travel, and that I thought was to-day—but it seems young fellows like you could find bottom three days ago—and inquired at every house. I had to start early and keep moving. When I came home your letter lay on the table. So you need not wonder after the experiences of such a day, I advise you to turn hangman."

Wesley walked the room; his head bowed in thought. It seemed too bad that she had trusted her family, and returned to them after all she had suffered. And yet in his heart he could not blame her for desiring their fellowship and blessing. They were bound to her by the closest ties of blood, and it was natural to trust parents, even if they had not always done the exact right. Susan was as deeply troubled as though Mercy had been an own sister; and while she sat in solemn silence, and Wesley paced the room, and the old doctor almost raved, the spectacle in that house was extremely sad.

Before the family retired they had planned to hunt for her along the cross-roads in that vicinity — hunt until they found some trace of the girl, living or dead. Susan could ride on horseback, and she was going with the men. But this plan did not offer sufficient promise of success to allay the fears of Dr. Sanford, or bring sleep to his eyes. In fact, he did not take the trouble to undress, but walked the room; and when at midnight there was a heavy knock on the door he was all ready to go down stairs and answer it.

“Are you Dr. Sales?” said a resonant voice from a tall and strong man in the doorway.

“I will call Dr. Sales,” said Wesley, and as he turned the stranger followed him into the house.

The doctor had heard the summons, and was already on the stairs, when Wesley went up to his room.

“Can you get your horse this minute, and ride a good many miles, and fast too? This awful weather has come near killing one of the finest girls in the world — we could not come after you, the roads were in such a state; and now you *must* save her. Can’t you hurry a little?”

“Who — who is it?” asked the doctor, a suspicion of the truth flashing across his mind.

“If I tell you it is Mercy Ryder who is sick, and may be dying, perhaps you’ll get your buttons together a little faster.”

“Heavens! Sanford, come down. We have found her. She’s alive.” And the doctor rushed out of the house before Sanford could fall over the stairs, three at a time, and soon had his best saddle-horse at the door.

"Thomas Jones! God bless you! I am glad Mercy is under your roof. This is more than I dared hope. I feared she was dead."

"And so she may be, for lack of help."

"Is she sick?"

"Do you think a girl slender as Mercy could walk fifteen miles in dead of winter and not get sick?" Wesley groaned. "And what do you suppose I came here for?"

"To tell Dr. Sales, I thought."

And she had walked fifteen miles! When? Perhaps when he thought Gray could not travel; the thought was agonizing. By this time Susan was down stairs, with her hearty greeting for the old friend, and a determination to go with the doctor. She had listened at the first distant tones of the voice in the hall, while Dr. Sanford, with his one-absorbing thought, went quickly to his own room.

"Well, Sanford, I am the oldest, and, of course, the best doctor, and you will see at once the importance of my going to Miss Ryder's bedside."

"Certainly. Go as her doctor; I don't think I should know one medicine from another." And Wesley walked to the door, and mounted the horse which Dr. Sales had made ready, while Thomas Jones followed. Susan made hasty inquiries concerning the direction and the distance, and the two men rode away. When they were gone it was arranged that she and Dr. Sales should follow them early in the morning.

"I guess he'll come to his wits, and know what to do. We will wait till daylight. Did he say how long she has been sick?"

"Ever since she came to his house. Something like four weeks."

"And a fever, too? A hard case for Sanford. He will need my counsel. Well, get up early, Susan." And Dr. Sales waited until morning, but in the impatient counting of the hours he wished he was on horseback in the open air.

CHAPTER XVII.

A FIGHT WITH DEATH

THE walk was too hard for Mercy, and besides she took cold. For several days she drooped, and gradually lost her strength, and then she was obliged to give up altogether. Had it been possible to apprise Dr. Sales of her whereabouts perhaps the fever might have been averted. As it was, the family did what they could for the sick girl, and watched for passable roads. Mercy utterly refused to see a strange doctor; and when in the delirium of the fever they called the nearest physician, his prescription or his presence made her manifestly worse. Now she had reached the crisis, and languished between life and death, and when Thomas Jones arrived at the house he thought best to see the condition of things before ushering in the doctor. She lay weak and helpless, and looked disappointed when Dr. Sales did not come in with her friend. A breath might extinguish the last spark of life, and yet something must be done. He went out, closing the door of her little bedroom, and talked a moment with Wesley. "It may be death to her,—and it may be life,—will you risk it?"

"I must see her," said Dr. Sanford; and he went in with fear and trembling.

Mercy looked bewildered when the vision of Wesley met her eyes, and for several minutes she gazed at him, apparently breathless. He stroked her forehead, and held her hand, but she made no sign of consciousness, save the deep and piercing gaze. He was alarmed at this, and went to prepare a powerful stimulant. When he turned from her, she cried after him in a weak, wailing voice, like one almost gone. But he was glad to hear even this. He knew that she was not suddenly paralyzed when she called him to stay. "Stay, Wesley." He feared before that she was. He gave her the tonic, and sat down to watch its effect. His "wits" were all about him, and he noted everything with a scientific carefulness. Her pulse strengthened a little, and after a while she slept. At intervals he wakened her, and, as fast as she could bear it, administered the stimulant. And so he watched — rarely taking his eyes from her face — and often examining to see if she really breathed.

When Dr. Sales looked in upon the unconscious girl, much earlier in the day than the Jones's expected him, he said bluntly that she would not live twenty-four hours, and turned away without a word of counsel. Wesley was hardly aware that he came, and if he heard the terrible words it only made him stronger to battle against such a fate. I think he did not hear them, but Susan did, and concluded to stay until there was a change.

Never mother watched a child more closely than Wesley Sanford watched this girl in her perilous weakness. He called her back to life, almost giving her his own breath and the crimson current of his

very heart. In this all-absorbing thought, Vinetown was forgotten, and the sick he left there were to him as though they had never been. Even his own existence seemed a thing in which he had no interest. If Mary Jones brought him a cup of tea, he swallowed it at a draught, and knew not whether it was hot or cold, and cared not whether he ate or drank. It was enough that he saw flickering intimations of life in Mercy, and that they brightened almost imperceptibly day by day.

When she was strong enough to sit up a little, he knew he ought to go home and look after his patients. But memory of the past chained him like a nightmare. In his long watching he had grown almost superstitious in his fear that fate would yet divide them; and, with the weakness superinduced by such a strain, he seemed fastened to the place, and utterly powerless to leave it. The calls of duty and the consciousness of obligation did not suffice to rouse him. He measured carefully the symptoms of this one patient, and watched and waited like one in a dream.

It took something of an electric shock to rouse him. One day Mary Jones laid a paper in his hand, pointing with her finger to a given paragraph. Slowly he gathered its meaning, and then remembered that he had given no account of himself to the citizens of Vinetown! No wonder they thought him dead! Well, he must certainly hurry back and show them that he had not been waylaid and murdered as they seemed to fear. But what should he tell them? If Mercy could go with him, her presence would be a sufficient explanation. As it was, he could not have

him, but he thought she would not go out and face death to escape him, if she was willing to be his wife. It would be giving up a great deal — a hope which he had cherished a good many years; but he could do it now. He went on as fast as he could, for the snow was drifting terribly, and besides, the Lake winds cut his shaven cheeks, and lanced his thin sides. Toward noon he stopped at Dr. Sales', and inquired for Mercy. The doctor and Susan were almost wild when they learned that she had left the house. This storm might freeze her if she did not seek shelter. And she was not there, where alone she could hope to find friends. When Dennis saw their alarm, he too trembled more and more for Mercy, and thought if she should be found dead he would be a branded Cain for the rest of his days. Taking out a little slip of paper he wrote something on it, and folding it carefully, gave it to Susan and went away, though they pressed him to take dinner, which was all ready.

When he was gone, Susan opened the paper and read: "I relinquish all claims to Mercy Ryder, and promise before God and witnesses never to trouble her any more;" and as she remembered the heavy look on his face, she was ready to cry in sympathy with his broken-hearted words.

Dennis did not come in until late at night, and the Ryders, being somewhat troubled, sat up for him. They asked no questions, but he told them he had found nothing of Mercy, though he had looked carefully along the road and in some of the woods and fields, and he was afraid she was dead.

The next day was Sunday, and the meeting came

He knew that the fear which made home terrible to Mercy was allayed, now that it was no longer possible for Horace and Eunice Ryder to prosecute their long-cherished purpose. He was not a father, but he invested that relationship with all sacred meanings, and his heart believed the tie a most near and tender one. He thought if Mercy was his child he should want to know whether she lived through the awful storm. It seemed terrible to him that her parents should suffer the agony of uncertainty which must hang over her fate, and now it seemed no longer necessary to her welfare that they should. He felt a little bitter toward the Ryders when he remembered how they crowded him to pay up the mortgage, until his reflections took another channel. When he really followed the way which this necessity led him, his soul melted into a forgiving atmosphere, and he wanted to return some thanksgiving to Horace for the evil which had brought such visible results of good. Here on the "borders of Palestine," as he called it, he was in a fair way to get rich. He bought his land cheap, and it was finely located. More than that, it was fertile and repaid his honest toil full sixtyfold. Evidently, it was a good thing for him that he was obliged to emigrate; and really Horace Ryder lay at the bottom of this success. If he had been easy with him, he might have spent his days in Otsego, on a farm so small and sterile that he could barely live.

Thomas Jones meditated, and then resolved to do the Ryders a good turn. Without divulging to any one his errand, he rode away one sunny April morning, and the inmates of his cabin did not see him again

news. At last, when the kindly earth had partially absorbed the snow, and the frost was busy with the rest, he started for C——, and in three days had picked his way to the hospitable door of Dr. Sales. That very evening the tardy letter had been read by the old doctor, and as he took in the iniquity which had so long victimized young Sanford, he felt like making a public example of the whole race of Ryders, of whom Mercy seemed not to be in any sense a member. The entrance of Wesley in the midst of his unpleasant reflections did not soften the mental atmosphere of Dr. Sales. As he looked upon him and read the lines which trouble and anxiety had written since he last saw his face, the intrigue and deception which lay at the bottom of this change, looked more and more hideous. The old man had to give vent to his feelings; the fire would blaze out.

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“What — what is it?” gasped Wesley. His first thought was of Mercy? Had she changed?

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first year we lived here I paid a dollar and a half for letters !”

“ John Irons wrote to me once a month, and I answered him regularly until his letters stopped coming because he was dead.”

“ You don’t say you’ve been living West any length of time ? ”

“ Some little time now. I count it by years.”

“ I suppose you’ve bought a place out here then ? ”

“ Yes, and paid for it, too, and now I am laying up money to build a house with. We are about tired of living in a log-house. I don’t see anybody around ; are you all alone now, Ryder ? Girls both married off, and Susan too ? ”

“ Susan keeps school in C——. We have found that out — ” and here Horace Ryder sighed. Jones thought that a good sign.

“ But where is Mercy ? ”

“ We don’t know where she is. We think she is dead.”

“ Do you want to know where she is ? ”

“ Ah ! If she is dead we know too well where she is. ‘ The wicked shall be cast into hell, with all the nations that forget God.’ ”

“ Well, how do you like the spectacle ? Is it pleasant to see your own child suffering the torments which you associate with hell ? Can you sit up there in heaven, and tune your harp, and feel comfortable, while you see before you little Mercy, who, in my judgment, is enough better than her father, suffering agony which shall never end ? ”

“ If we are sanctified we shall be resigned to God’s

Before the family retired they had planned to hunt for her along the cross-roads in that vicinity — hunt until they found some trace of the girl, living or dead. Susan could ride on horseback, and she was going with the men. But this plan did not offer sufficient promise of success to allay the fears of Dr. Sanford, or bring sleep to his eyes. In fact, he did not take the trouble to undress, but walked the room; and when at midnight there was a heavy knock on the door he was all ready to go down stairs and answer it.

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“I will call Dr. Sales,” said Wesley, and as he turned the stranger followed him into the house.

The doctor had heard the summons, and was already on the stairs, when Wesley went up to his room.

“Can you get your horse this minute, and ride a good many miles, and fast too? This awful weather has come near killing one of the finest girls in the world — we could not come after you, the roads were in such a state; and now you *must* save her. Can’t you hurry a little?”

“Who — who is it?” asked the doctor, a suspicion of the truth flashing across his mind.

“If I tell you it is Mercy Ryder who is sick, and may be dying, perhaps you’ll get your buttons together a little faster.”

“Heavens! Sanford, come down. We have found her. She’s alive.” And the doctor rushed out of the house before Sanford could fall over the stairs, three at a time, and soon had his best saddle-horse at the door.

when you harden it, and fill it with cold and unfeeling impulses, you are wicked, though you may have been converted a thousand times. When you play the tyrant instead of the father, and try to force your child to do things that are contrary to all the dictates of her own heart, you are wicked."

"Mr. Jones, I don't need a sermon from you."

"I think you do. I came here on a heavenly errand, but thought it best to see whether you were ready for the good news before I told it. Would you be glad to know that Mercy is alive?"

"We have cast Mercy off, utterly."

"Oh, Horace, if Mercy is alive and well I think we had better send for her to come home. There'll be a great deal of work to do this summer?"

"She would not come home to stay if you should send for her, but I thought if I was in your place I should want to know what had become of my child, and so I came to tell you."

"We do want to know. Tell us," said Eunice. Then Jones told her about Mercy coming to his house in the storm, and the awful fever and the slow convalescence.

"I suppose you have come to get pay for taking care of her, but I shall pay no debts of her contracting. She left a good home, where she might have had plenty all her days, and she can take the consequences," said Horace, the class-leader.

"You are out of joint there, Mr. Ryder. I didn't take a spring day, and ride fifteen miles for money, though I could have earned a little by staying at home. Just try on the golden rule, Horace, and see how it fits,

and how it feels too ; and then may be you can understand the spirit of my errand. I did as I should wish to be done by were the circumstances reversed."

Horace fidgeted about, as though trying to adjust something, but "trying on the golden rule" was something quite out of his line. So Tom Jones had all the joy of his heavenly errand in his own heart. Ryder, not being used to such acts himself, could not appreciate this one.

"But we want Mercy to come home," said Eunice, as though addressing her husband.

"I don't think it best to open the door to her again," was the reply of this father.

"But, Horace, she would stay this time. You know the paper said Wesley Sanford had been murdered by robbers."

"No, she wouldn't stay. When the paper said that about Sanford he was at my house watching every symptom of Mercy's fever, and he forgot all about Vinetown in his devotion to her, and they will be married as soon as she is able to travel."

"Well, for my part, I'd about as lief see our Mercy dead and buried as living a life of poverty with that infidel. Wouldn't you, Horace?"

"It's a great disgrace — a great disgrace, wife. But we must bear it with Christian fortitude, and let them go their own road. We shall never acknowledge either of them, or have anything to do with them."

"Well, Ryder, I think your notions of disgrace are quite original. Wesley Sanford is a man of unblemished character, and a mind capable of any work he sees fit to undertake. He has a good profession and

is successful in practice. He loves your daughter, and you have no reason to fear a life of poverty if she marries him, unless, indeed, he is too generous and kind-hearted to get rich. Such a practice as he has would make a man who collected his bills rich in less than ten years. For my part, I can't see where the disgrace comes in."

"I suppose you sympathize with his infidelity, and poverty, too, and we don't expect you to see our feelings. There's Isadore well married, and a pride to her father and mother; but we've had trouble enough with Mercy and she can go. She'll never get any of our property if she does need it."

"Well, she won't need it. You can be easy on that score; and if it is any comfort to you to know that she is alive and getting well, and will soon be married to Dr. Sanford, be just as happy over it as possible. That is what I came to tell you, and now I'll go back. Her presence in our house is all the reward we want for our little services."

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOME ON THE ALLEGHANY

WHEN June roses blossomed, and the grape had shed its scented flower, and begun to wear rich promise of fruit, the new house on the Alleghany put back its snowy curtains, and a form flitted to and fro within, and eyes which had received the baptism of many tears watched the singing kettle for its first puff of steam, then glanced a moment over the little round table, with its dishes of pink and white, as they sought the shining windows which overlooked the door-yard, and the grass-bordered road.

In the garden an old man leaned a moment over his hoe, and thought the soil of the Alleghany valley fuller of promise than he had ever known, as he compared the size of the corn and melon-vines with what he had been accustomed to see at the same season, when he cultivated a farm instead of a garden, and it was called Sanford's on the Susquehanna. The descending sun lit his face and warmed the snow of his hair, and with the luxuriance it had touched into life about him kindled a pleasant hope in his heart, which for the time dissipated its loneliness and made the picture in the garden one of plenty and content.

Along the margin of the river a horseman rode, not fast, nor very slow. The burnished belt of water, with its shimmering and changing light and hues, as western rays fell aslant its surface, made him look intensely and linger reverently, until a thought transfigured his heart as sunshine the river, and then his steed made longer and swifter paces. In the past he had loitered along this enchanting way, drinking in its marvellous beauty—the river a mirror for every tree, and vine, and wild rose along its bank; and no thought coming like a flash of inspiration to hurry his pace or dazzle his heart with a brighter vision. Now the glory of the familiar scene was surpassed by another, which every fleet step brought out of the land of dreams, nearer and nearer the realm of reality. A little way before was a spot rose-guarded and fair with a light above the sun. This spot he named home. It is a blessed name when it is the shrine of your household gods and the altar of your love; and when it is not all this it is not home. Men who toil amid life's rough or painful places need the sheltering arms and inspiring spirit of home to guard them when worn with the battle and rest them for its renewal. Women who sweep floors, and make bread, or who try to brush down the cobwebs of falsehood, and lay bare the way where the bread of life is stored, need the seclusion and the familiar aspect of home. It is not yet settled whether man fills and fits the house which shelters him, as a snail fills and fits its shell, but I have lately seen a woman who says her home is a part of herself. She had touched it with her soul's magnetism until it was intense with life. There were focal places where her thought flowed freest, and

the ink upon her pen found no pauses in which to thicken or dry. She told me this with a voice which had an undertone of despair in it, for she had tried to sit down in strange places and mend a broken thread. Not yet had this horseman nearing the spot where the light of love shone above the brightness of the sun had time to grow into every nook and cranny and magnetize and fill the whole; perhaps he never would. He lived too much in other places. But the little one who watches the kettle, and then the highway, to catch a glimpse of his first appearance, will grow into the place and fill it with rays from her inner life or she is not a woman.

This home with its shining windows is reached at last. A bridle rein falls lightly over the gate-post. Watching eyes have ceased spanning the highway, and within the small room made luminous by a love which time and suffering had perfected, Wesley Sanford sits down at the head of the evening board, and his wife Mercy pours the tea. Loudon looks over the pleasant picture, and recalls a time when his locks were not white, nor the willow planted in the grave-yard by the Susquehanna. It seems fresh and near—his marriage with Rachel—and he sees the snowy folds of her garments and the flowers she wore. The wedding guests flit before him in the livery of those early times; the young men, his companions, in picturesque breeches and silk stockings, with knee-buckles and shoe-buckles of silver. He sees their faces in the ruddy light of youth, and for a moment forgets that the vision is not reality. The silence at the board, too full of rest to be other than silence, helps him to indulge his happy dream.

But Loudon Sanford could not live too long amid so distant a past. Some discord of the living present stood by his side to shock him into a sense of the great gulf of years which lay between now and then. It is always so when we are lost in blissful dreams; I suppose because man was made for work, not reverie. But to him who has toiled until life's evening there should be space for a look backward, which the old so constantly crave.

The jingle of a tea-spoon brought Loudon Sanford back from the sweet vision of his own marriage, to the actual present of a married son, born when he was a long way from youth. It was a lengthened path. His shoe-buckles had re-appeared in spoons, and the whole fashion of the time was changed. He lost the picture of Rachel, his bride, and caught a fairer picture — “beloved of angels and bride of the Lamb.”

The young men — his companions — leaned upon the staff of age. Some of them had gone through “the valley of the shadow of death” leaning upon that support which never fails; the staff of the Lord, which is the vision of faith he opens before us when flesh and earthly sight fail.

And now the three look up with one thought, and Loudon asks if no word has yet come from Charles, and at the answer, “none, father,” a shadow creeps over the old man's face, and Wesley and Mercy feel it none the less. And this home, just consecrated, is not in heaven, but on earth, where, if the immediate surroundings are those of peace and joy, and the rose blossoms by the window, the hut of Giles, the drunkard, is just over the way, Lazarus lies by the gate too sick to

work, and so a beggar, and there are thorns on the stem of every rose.

The one question, and its brief answer, and then the little room is still again, and thought makes its unseen journeys. Wesley, not given to apprehensions of evil, shakes off the sudden pain caused by his father's question, and thanks God in his heart that at last he has found the rest of home. And as he turns to a book while Mercy flits about the room, putting the pink dishes in order on the open shelves, each plate edge-wise, so that every figure of man or beast may show its perfect outline, he reads the pages less than the picture of this skilful woman, and forgets for the time that there is want or pain in the world.

But the time in which a conscientious physician can forget this must be very brief indeed. Already a hand is on the latch which will break his dream. A stranger enters and tells his errand. Wesley goes quickly out, and soon the two ride in the summer twilight down the margin of the Alleghany, and after two hours tie their horses to a fence made of small trees instead of rails. It is not high, and a gate therefore quite unnecessary. The men leap the fence, and soon open the door of a log-house of the rudest pattern. There is but one room and on a bed in the corner the doctor sees his patient. He approaches the bed, and taking the hand of its occupant, looks on him a minute. The candle-light flickers over a face of uncommon beauty, and reveals the outline of a form tall and lithe. Hair black as night falls across the forehead, and the perfect lines above his eyes are thick and quite as dark. But the eyes are shut, and the doctor's

presence is all unheeded. For a second it seemed too late — this two hours' ride, but there was a faint flutter in the wrist which told of the presence of a soul in this splendid temple.

Evidently something more terrible than ague had prostrated this strong man. But the disease seemed to have spent its fury, and the work of the doctor must be one of restoration. Hardly a flicker of life remained, but Dr. Sanford, as he looked upon this appealing weakness, felt that it must be fanned into a flame. This was no common man, he knew, and such as he might be helpers and kings among the common people. Such as he — men who are great in soul — the world needs.

It was midnight before the doctor's restoratives made any more visible signs of life in the patient. Then the pulse strengthened perceptibly, and the sick man opened his eyes. He looked at the doctor, then at his neighbor. There were no others in the room. No woman's presence softened his pillow or made the darkness luminous. He had endured his agony alone, until the chance call of the neighbor, and during his four hours' absence. As Dr. Sanford caught the expression of his eyes the look seemed familiar. He had certainly seen this man before. And where? He recalled the past, until the magnificent picture found its setting afar back at a camp-meeting in Otsego. Now he distinctly remembered the man, and his burning words of warning and exhortation as he stood on the platform with his brother ministers. He remembered the vivid picture which he portrayed of the agony of a lost soul, and how his own young heart had shivered

and fainted at the awful spectacle held up before the people in such life-like colors. No man had ever described the torments of the damned as though he so really felt them as this man. What change had sent him here into this exile? a hermit living alone in a rude cabin? now alas! lying perhaps in life's extremity with his awful secret locked by the approach of death. Swifter than I have written Dr. Sanford thought, and after the deep eyes of the stricken man had gazed at the two about him until assured that they were men, and that himself was yet alive, slowly his lips revealed the occasion of this extremity of weakness.

"Why have you brought me back? I had started on the way to eternity. I couldn't trust the world any longer. I wanted to die now — now! while there is some chance for me in heaven. O God! the agony that has gone over my soul since she died. I wanted to know,— I must know if she is in hell? Why should she go to hell? She was better than I am, truer, purer, nearer to Christ in her life. But the church divided us. She died before she was converted, and they told me she was damned. For years I have preached damnation to the unconverted. My wife was one of them, and now she is gone. Why should I suffer so for my wife in hell? The saints ought not to suffer. But she was my wife. O God, I loved her better than my own soul! Take away this returning strength and give me death! I want to know if my wife is in hell. God is good. My wife was good, but she was not converted. There is no hope — no hope! Shall I carry this heart with me there? Shall I love her there? Then, O God, give me hell with her, rather than heaven with Thee!"

“George Marks!” said Dr. Sanford — for in the struggle of memory he had recalled his name; the sick man stopped in his raving, astonished that a stranger should speak his name, “George Marks, God is good, you say. What do you mean by that when in the very same breath you tell me he has sent your wife to hell. You would not inflict such a doom upon your worst foe. Do you think you are better than God? You call yourself a saint. I think you are almost a devil to believe that a woman whom you call good is damned, and the God whom you call good has damned her. Throw your church creed into the flames. Take in the right hand of your reason the Bible, which is God’s revealed will, and show me the place upon its pages where a single soul whom he has created receives the doom of endless damnation. God is good, and his tender mercies are over all his works. Here he numbers your hairs and takes note of the falling sparrow. In the life to come he is the same Father, and your wife, his child, is in a Father’s keeping.”

The sick man’s eyes were riveted upon the doctor’s face. He did not move them, nor attempt to speak, but lay like one trying to grasp an object which the waves had swept almost to land. The awful fears which haunted him had been startled from their nesting-place by the bold and authoritative words of Dr. Sanford. He tried to think, tried to reason, but was too weak for that. Something tender, dropped from the lips of the doctor, was creeping about his heart and warming it back to life. It may have been God’s care of the sparrows, it may have been his careful

numbering of the hairs of our heads. The sick man closed his eyes, and in a little while he slept. The two men watched him tenderly through the slow hours of morning, lest he should fade into the sleep of death.

When he opened his eyes again he saw still the vision of his helper bending over him. In a moment he recalled the past and thanked God that he was still alive. The doctor cautioned him to be quiet and think only pleasant thoughts, and be sure and get well very soon, so that he might atone by a devoted life for the sin he had committed in attributing to God such ungodly deeds. Then leaving him in the care of his friend, whose wife came in with the early light, and with the promise of another visit very soon, he rode away — not, however, until the patient had demanded how he knew his name was George Marks, for not by this did the neighbors know the hermit. "I have heard you preach in Otsego," said Sanford, and hurried on, glad to have broken the chain of his haunting thoughts.

George Marks had done his duty conscientiously, and to the best of his ability, as a preacher of Methodism. He had enforced its conclusions with the spirit and power of a sincere and earnest soul. When the new faith began to awaken interest in the area of his circuit he struck at it boldly, believing he thus served God. All the power of his eloquence, combined with a conviction of duty, was directed toward expulsion from community of a system of doctrines which he considered dangerous to the interests of immortal souls. The school-house, with light in its

windows, was pointed out to his hearers as a place of outer darkness, the ante-room of the pit. Those who put their trust in human assertion, without taking the trouble of personal investigation, believed and avoided the place to which his emphatic warnings pointed. Others who thought such heavy broadsides as the Elder delivered must be aimed at something worthy of the ammunition, determined at once to hear for themselves; so that really his fierce denunciations helped the truth more than they hindered it, for the hearer became a convert and follower. Sometimes to the calm and reflective listener his frequent and terrible attacks upon the infant sect seemed almost the utterances of a mind insane. But they were only the convictions of an honest, earnest man. If his sermons were fuller of the fiery bolts of damnation than some others of the circuit ministers, it was because he felt the imminent pressure of the awful peril. He did not see it through spectacles, nor think of it as though in a dream, and when his wife, with whom he had plead vainly for many years, slipped out of life without being converted, the waves swept over his soul, almost obliterating all thought save of her and the awful doom which he believed she suffered. He could no longer lift up his voice in the congregation. The burden of his ministry lay like a nightmare upon his own heart. From the fireside of domestic love the living light had suddenly disappeared, quenched in darkness, fathomless and impenetrable; and whenever he would warn a sinning world he thought of the lost Ada, who had lived a gentle life, indeed — but that was not enough. He meditated daily upon her

doom, and at night the long hours were counted out in heart-beats of agony; and if, perchance, his tired brain found momentary respite in oblivion it was only momentary. He would start from his pillow haunted by the vision of his wife in seething flames.

His cheeks were gaunt, and his eyes fuller of unnatural fires, and the brethren feared he had grown insane over the loss of his companion. Then of a sudden they missed him, and knew not where he had gone. No longer was his name counted among the circuit ministers far and near, and some old heads were shaken gravely, and wise tongues whispered suspicions of suicide.

But George Marks was not yet ready to explore the eternity of which he had painted such shocking pictures. He was, indeed, almost insane over the one appalling thought, but in the midst of this horror he sought exile, not death. For two years he had lived almost like a wild man in the forests of the Alleghany. He had wandered until his fancy was satisfied by the dense seclusion of these woods, and here he worked enough to keep himself from starving, and kept up his meditation, never for a moment illumined by a ray from God's fatherly love, but growing continually blacker, and more terribly haunting, until he had brought himself to the verge of death by his own act, and come near realizing the fears of his far away brethren.

But the release from horrible thoughts long haunting him, which he had so resolutely sought, was averted by the presence and skill of Dr. Sanford. He lies upon his bed, weak and helpless, but calmer than he

had been since he was left alone in the world. Perhaps he was too near gone to be other than calm ; and perhaps the "Morning Star" is sending one ray among the inner darkness, which shall shine more and more until the perfect day. It may be weakness of body which makes him feel such undisturbed peace. It may be the presence of a thought gradually girding his soul with a strength unknown before. He must grow stronger physically before we venture to solve the problematic calm, and reveal the origin and foundations of the tender influences which soften and sway the atmosphere of his inner life. A soul that has faced eternity without entering the celestial gates comes back to us for a purpose, as we shall see.

CHAPTER XIX.

CHARLES SANFORD.

BY the door of a miserable-looking inn a young man leaps from 'his saddle, and seeks the traveller's shelter. He is tired with the journey of the day and several preceding days, and, as he goes up the steps to the dingy door, his face seems a little heavy for one so young. This spot where we look upon him is not in California, and the young man is not really a gold-hunter. I am glad to be able to state that it is not anywhere within the borders of the land of Washington, though dingy taverns are not unknown in the United States. We occasionally see one that invites to despair rather than rest and comfort even to this day. And sometimes, when the outer guise is all inviting, within are found skilful devices for making skeletons and rending the air with worse than orphan groans. But I suppose that will be so to the end of time. We shall not demolish either the whited sepulchres or the dingy traps whose traffic we can read at a glance. We hope to help the growth of a race of souls strong enough in their sense of God's fatherhood to walk through furnaces of fire and dens of lions unharmed. How strong is this young man, going up the steps of a Canadian inn? He was born before the wars for the

defence of the citadel of manhood. He has never thought his own individuality in any danger from lurking enemies. He is young and strong and ambitious, though just now he finds he has chased a phantom. The high wages he expected to get, and the ready employment, seem to be still further on. He has not yet reached the mythical spot, though he expected to as soon as he crossed the border. He is a little heavy-hearted. His money is almost out. He cannot follow delusions much longer.

Well, he sits down in what Americans call the bar-room. He seems to be chilly, for he draws his chair close to the roaring fire, and reaches out his hands as though to catch the blaze. Some one behind the counter sees his attitude and reads the shiver. There is a clinking sound, and then a gurgle — was it of the sharp agony and running blood of broken hearts? I think it was. Something is reached out to the stranger amid patronizing words. "It will warm you, sir, and prevent taking cold."

Charles Sanford touches the full goblet, over which was heard the ominous gurgle as of running blood. He clasps it an instant, and then it stands again upon the counter. But it is empty. The gathered richness of a life hangs on the verge of a precipice, all ignorant of the threatening doom. One in whose native blood are insatiate longings, slumberous until now, feels the fever kindle and burn in his veins. Would that the tempter had been turned aside! But alas, human strength is weakness!

His rare powers brightened soon, and the cold slipped away from his limbs and the despair from

his heart! He felt himself the ruler of a kingdom. The few villagers that frequented the inn assured their travel-worn, but now exhilarated companion, that he had found the long-sought location. A teacher was needed in that community, and he was evidently just the man. To be sure the pay was no more than was common at home, and the vain hopes awakened by some enthusiastic story-teller were destined to be utterly disappointed. But the conditions grew each day more imperative, and Charles was glad of any opening at all.

Next day he found that his companions of the previous evening represented the sentiment and authority of the place, and he was really hired as a teacher, and his constant home was to be the inn.

The school embraced all ages of children, and was very large. Among others were two sons of the richest man in the village, who were as old as their teacher, but very backward in education. They had given their time to sports all through the years of boyhood, and were now somewhat ashamed of their manly acquisitions. They were in the fortunate attitude for learners, ashamed of the disparity between the size of their bodies and the advancement of their minds. Very soon they were on good terms with the young teacher, and often invited him to be a guest at their father's house. This broke the charm of the rickety inn, and stayed the feet of young Sanford in a career which at first promised to be swift and disastrous. There was an air of home about the house of Peter Knight, and when Charles went there directly from the school-house he enjoyed it. When he went

from the inn he was uneasy, and could not so readily help the young men in their studies. He preferred to talk, and sometimes the old father wondered at the disparity between the recounted exploits of different evenings, but did not think his home at the inn was becoming his ruin, until one day in the early autumn, when he had been half a year teacher of the village school, Peter Knight drove to Sanford's boarding-place for the purpose of taking him home with him. Some visitors from a neighboring town had come to pass the evening, and he desired the presence and brilliant conversation of the school-master to enliven the scene, so he went after him slyly in order to surprise his boys.

As he drove back alone and somewhat slowly he was glad no soul in the house knew of his errand. The kind heart of this man was pained at the disappointment, and really pained at its cause. He was glad to be exempt from the necessity of making excuses to his family or his guests. Peter Knight had always taken a glass of brandy when he pleased, and he fully believed it right to have the largest liberty in this as in other personal desires, but he despised the weakness of indulgence, and had little charity for the man who overstepped the bounds of sobriety. When he saw young Sanford in a heavy sleep, from which he could not rouse him, the respect which he had hitherto entertained for the young man was sensibly diminished. He thought every man should be king in his own realm and govern himself. And the fact of this fall made him feel that the school-master was unfit for his position and unworthy the post of teacher and

confidant in his own house. He did not realize that some men have no self-control after the first temptation, nor know that there is no safety to the world but in total abstinence. He judged men from the standpoint of his own well-poised strength.

The guests at his house knew nothing of the cause of his brooding manner during the evening. That he made an effort to talk was apparent. But they probably attributed this lack of usual vivacity to the weariness which creeps about the evening of life. Peter Knight was slipping down the seventh decade, and if he was absorbed and dull of an evening it was perfectly natural.

On the following morning Charles was surprised by the announcement that Peter Knight desired to see him in his own room. He was not yet fully awake when informed of his visitor's request. He tried to brush the mists from his heavy eyes and find his clothes. The room seemed to be vibrating in the autumn wind. He reached out his hand for the support of the bedpost, and stood a moment to collect his senses. He did not remember anything about coming to bed on the previous night. He struggled to recall some occurrence that might serve as a key to this singular oblivion. He remembered being overpowered with sleep, and lying down upon a lounge in the bar-room. Was that all? Was it real healthy sleep that soothed and wrapped him? An infant may fall asleep so soundly as to be placed in bed without waking; but it is not common for grown persons to become so utterly oblivious unless from exhaustion and long watching. Charles had not suffered from fatigue

or watching. The awful conclusion came over him like the rush of an avalanche that he had been insensible, and some one had undressed him as though he were a helpless child. He staggered toward a chair and almost fell into it. His remorse was terrible — his shame unspeakable. He covered his face with his hands and burst into tears. The eyes of the sainted Rachel seemed to look upon him with their calm reproof. His old father's fiery rebuke stung him like a serpent. The friends of his boyhood grouped about him, each pointing the finger of scorn or weeping tears of sorrow at his fall. There was Wesley, steady and self-poised as a column of polished marble, looking his silent condemnation; and Mercy with trembling lips and eyes out of which floods seemed ready to fall upon this dark stain. And in the midst of the haunting and rebuking group, a central luminous figure with bowed head and a face out of which hope seemed to have died forever, stood Susan Rice. Then there were groans mingled with the young man's tears.

He felt that he could never look in the face of honest Peter Knight or stand before the questioning gaze of his pupils. But already a step was on the stair and a hand on the latch. Charles tried to wash off the agony which was written on his face and appear natural. He knew nothing of the old man's visit the night before, and would have given worlds to hide his shame. But alas! we cannot wash out the traces of sin nor hide the shame of transgression. There is hope for the man who feels ashamed when he has violated a law of his nature and broken a command of God.

The face of Peter Knight softened when he saw the traces of remorse in his young friend, and for a moment his heart failed him, and he was about to return without the words of counsel and warning which were the object of this early visit. But Charles was not used to dissembling and he could not act with ease. A few commonplace remarks about the weather and the season, and in the ominous silence which followed he knew the keen eyes of the old man read him through and through.

"I shall resign my post and go home soon, Mr. Knight," said Charles, in a choked and embarrassed way.

"Better put forth every energy to fill it well. Teaching school is responsible business. You've done well so far. But you must keep your head above water, Sanford. I'm afraid my boys wouldn't learn much more if they had seen what I saw last night. We had visitors and I came after you." Charles covered his face and groaned audibly. The old man relented a little and smoothed the edges of his rebuke. "The boys know nothing about it, Sanford, and if this is the last they never shall know. But this is a bad place for you — so many loafers about. Come to my house for the fall and winter. It will be more like home. I am sorry I did not think of it before. We can keep you as well as not, and then you can help the boys evenings."

Charles was overwhelmed by the kindness of this offer, coming as it did in the midst of his disgrace, and gladly accepted it. But his pride was terribly crushed, and it was some time before he felt at ease.

In fact, the memory of his fall served as a talisman for months. He suffered enough from this to make him vigilant for awhile. And when old Peter Knight poured out his brandy at the dinner-table, and his sons, Peter and Samuel, drank with him, Charles Sanford did not dare to touch the enemy with which encounter was certain defeat.

There had been disappointment and woe connected with his life in Canada, and that is why there is anxiety in the new house on the Alleghany. Charles was too proud to make report of himself. He remembered too vividly the fairy pictures he had painted for London to look upon. He was ashamed to tell that he kept school in a small and dilapidated town where the privileges of home were not available, and received no larger compensation than he could readily get without the trouble and expense of travel, or the deprivation of the privilege of American citizenship. Not until after his pride was broken somewhat by the shame of his fall did he send any word of his whereabouts to his old father. Then he made a clean breast of the matter, and confessed that he had done no better than at home. But before this word reached them, there was an accumulated weight of anxiety in this new house very hard to endure.

CHAPTER XX.

REUNIONS.

IN the early autumn Dr. Sales took especial pains to pay a visit to his friend, Dr. Sanford.

Susan Rice accompanied him. She wanted to see Mercy in a house of her own, and have one of the old-time confidential talks. A hundred miles seemed a barrier easily over-passed when so much joy lay at the end of the journey. To be sure it was further than she had ever ridden on horseback, but Dr. Sales was not willing to risk his new carriage on a spur of the Alleghanies, and Susan was willing to go in any possible way for the sake of going.

Mercy, watching the window for Wesley, saw two persons on horseback coming over the ferry, and one of them she knew was Susan. No other woman of her acquaintance could ride so well as that. In fact none of her acquaintance lived far enough away to need the help of a horse in their visits. Besides Susan, she counted her friends in the neighborhood, believing the young men and maidens in her father's vicinity had cast her off as he had.

Soon the intervening distance was overpast, and these dear friends received the hearty welcome of the little wife. The joy in that new house was a new joy.

They had never before had visitors — real migrating people who come with their saddle-bags and stay a week. Motherly women about Vinetown came in for an hour, but they did not stay to tea because they were afraid to be too familiar at the doctor's. This fear was not caused by awe of the young man or his meek and gentle wife; but of the profession which is so intimately associated in some minds with the lancet and nauseating doses. So Mercy's skill as hostess had never before been put to the test. She felt a little nervous as she flew about adjusting the table for her guests. She wished there was another room where the old doctor could sit while she made his tea. *His* house was large, and there was a parlor in it, where the rattle of dishes did not enter. Just a minute Mercy thought these thoughts, and they came of timidity not discontent. Then she grew more and more at her ease as conversation warmed, and the little incidents of the journey were related amid peals of hearty laughter. She forgot that her home was small as a dove's nest, and all the world seemed hers, possessed of such true hearts to love her; and when her husband came at last, and, amid congratulations and thanksgivings, they gathered about the board, Mercy was as calm and queenly in her ways as though she had kept house a dozen years and entertained noble guests daily. Even Loudon Sanford himself was visibly brightened by the advent of these friends. Susan brought with her a breath of the land where Rachel lived and died; and Susan knew and loved the sainted woman buried under the willow. Not often did the lines about the old man's mouth relax in smiles. He was a sedate man,

and sorrow had touched him with added shadows. Not so much for the dead—he knew she was better off than his love or care could make her, but for the absent and silent living whom he mourned anxiously, not knowing whether he was living or dead. Charles' pride had made a deep furrow in his father's heart where bitter waters stagnated. If Charles had written frequent letters, and told the whole truth about himself, that could have been easier borne than this ominous silence so long continued.

But for a time at the supper-board Loudon gave himself up to the current of joy, and chatted and smiled with the rest, until Mercy felt that it was a great blessing to have visitors if they could bring sunshine to her father's face.

After supper these wise physicians discussed the localities of their different sections with reference to the health of the inhabitants, and related incidents in their experience that would be of interest and benefit in future labors.

“I have had a case in hand the past summer very singular indeed, Dr. Sales; a Methodist minister so tormented by the conclusions of his theory when they found application to his own family, that he became insane and attempted suicide. He took arsenic, an over-dose, which produced retching, but still it has so affected his system that I sometimes despair of entire restoration. His mind, however, is clear, and he seems to care for nothing but to read and meditate. Not in the old insane channels, I assure you. I have argued with him, and explained to him, until he sees new light and is daily pursuing his investigations of the doctrine

of Universalism. He is a careful, conscientious man, and will not avow his faith until it is fully established. But the research which he is making can only end in conviction. I want to cure him, but the interest of his mind is against my counsel in this direction. He takes no exercise. Reads and thinks all the time. Of course he cannot gain strength in this way, and he was terribly reduced. At best it would take him a long time to recover. You must visit him with me, and help plan to get him into God's sunlight and air once more. He does not seem to know he has a body, or any bodily needs. In fact his body is small when compared with his soul. But I want to save them both together. I have work for him to do in this benighted region."

"I shall be very glad to see your singular patient. I guess he needs somebody besides you, Sanford. You have been stuffing his soul, I see, and therefore starving his body."

"But I had to put forth my utmost endeavors to eradicate his false notions. He was sick both soul and body; and I know the terror of soul-tortures, so I put forth my utmost endeavors to dispel them, not thinking there was danger of his being so utterly absorbed in the new and better thoughts as to work disaster to the house his splendid spirit lives in. I could do no other way. But I am really afraid he will die. He eats nothing and hardly looks outside of his hut. I found him weaker to-day than on my last visit."

"Why don't you bring him home with you? Has he a family?"

"No; he is utterly alone; and has no care save

such as a single neighbor can find time to bestow upon him. I have tried to persuade him to stay with me until he recovers, but he utterly refuses to do so."

"We will see him to-morrow and bring him by main force. The shock will do him good. And then we'll divert him with stories about starving hermits until he forgets his soul; or at least remembers his body. I can manage him. But you won't have room for any more hermits, Sanford, until we get out of the house. I shall stay at least a week — perhaps we had better not bring him home with us to-morrow."

"Yes; we will bring him if possible. I know that will be the only way to save him. You have no idea how capacious these small houses are. There are two bedrooms you see, and a chamber over all the house capable of holding any number of sleepers properly stowed. And there is plenty of good oat-straw in my barn — the best material for beds that was ever used yet; not only for horses but men. You inhale the fresh fields while you sleep, and your dreams are of birds and strawberry meadows."

"Yes, I see; it is all plain. We will see that your double-sick patient has some of those healthy scents, if we have to use both force and stratagem in our plan."

"Don't call him 'double-sick' now. His soul is in a healthy condition, and growing in a safe and hopeful way."

"I don't know, Sanford, about well *souls* unless the man is sound throughout. But, of course you want to feel that success has attended your especial endeavor, and that, as you confess, has been in the direction of the inner life. Not sick, perhaps, and still not well because not master of the house it lives in."

"In that sense, of course not well. But it is out of the prison of insanity; and out of that worse than prison, the awful fears and horror induced by a faith which is crazy in all its conclusions."

While the wisdom of experience and the observing and ready mind of young Sanford were holding communion, Susan and Mercy were sitting in one of the little bedrooms, talking fast and in low tones; and from the other came an indistinct murmur as of some one reading aloud. It was Loudon Sanford, conning his daily lesson from the same old and blessed book which used to lie on the swinging-shelf beside the chimney in Otsego. He liked to sit down alone and read the chapters they used to read together when his family had no green grave among its number, nor any chasm of death in life, or ominous haunting fear. In this way the past came vividly back to him, and he liked to recall the past. Always while reading he could see the calm face of Rachel, so full of rest and reverent worship that nothing on the earth seemed able to disturb the sea of her silent thoughts. And though he was still priest of the family altar, and Wesley and Mercy his reverent listeners, the heart of the old man sought the closet for his most intimate communion with the Father and the loved and lost. We know by the murmur of his voice that he reads God's Word. We have been told it is his daily habit. But we must listen at the door of the other bedroom, and hear the words before we can tell the subject discussed by its occupants. They have not met in months, and have no daily habit so readily deciphered by its most distant sign as this one of Loudon Sanford's. They talk

of many things. Of home and how Mercy likes house-keeping. Of the neighbors; whether they are kind to the inexperienced wife and ready to tell her why it is if the yeast sometimes sours, and the corn-pone falls when taken from the oven. Whether they visit much or little, and who of all in the village is kindest and most motherly to the young stranger. Every trivial matter receives elaborate discussion, and it would seem from the steady flow of talk that these women were intensely interested in the little themes they handle so rapidly and deftly. But at present they are not, I assure you. Though most women are sufficiently interested in domestic matters to be styled "Marthas," with perhaps too little of the Mary spirit to soothe their hurry and constant work, and though these two had profound respect for the common dusty ways of life, and despised the daintiness or indolence of her who keeps utterly aloof from home-care, they talked to-night, not heartily, but to put off other thoughts which were in each mind, and would knock so heavily at a single pause of silence. They wanted to put off an unpleasant theme, or rather they dreaded to open it to each other.

Susan knew that Charles had gone to Canada to teach school. She knew that Mercy avoided mention of his name in her letters. She did not know it was because she hated to tell her they had heard nothing from their wandering brother. Hoping to hear very soon, and disliking to impart to Susan the anxiety which had long shadowed the new house on the Alleghany, she had discussed everything in her letters, as she did now in her talk. And Susan who had not the

childlike and confiding spirit of Mercy in such matters as this, never asked of Charles or mentioned his name. But Mercy could not longer keep silent, now that her friend was before her face, and the small talk had to come to a sudden stop.

"We have not heard a word from Charles since he went to Canada last spring."

Susan was a little whiter at this, but calm, and could speak without visible emotion.

"Do you think he is dead?"

"Father is afraid he is; but Wesley says he is not. He thinks the letters have not come; and that Charles will be here this fall."

"I don't think Charles would fail to write. I'm afraid he is dead."

"Most likely he has written, but the letters have been miscarried. He would certainly write if he is alive. You know Canada is in another dominion, and something might happen to the letters. I don't feel as though he is dead, but of course we are troubled about him. Father has bought a farm up the valley and wants Charles to be a farmer and let him live with him. He is used to land now, and would be happier to have more to do. But I guess our garden would miss him. Come out in the garden, Susan! O, it is too dark. Where has the time gone?"

"Yes, it is dark. Don't you know whereabouts in Canada Charles went?"

"No. We only know he started to go there. But I think he'll surely come home this fall. Oh, wouldn't we be too happy if he should come now! I have had a very happy summer, except our trouble about Charles,

—and our folks. Of course it is not quite pleasant to have them feel as they do. Wesley says they will get over it in time; and if they don't we can live without them. Our consciences are clear."

There was a light rap on the door, and Wesley looked in with a pleasant face, and told them it was not quite right to burrow up there for a whole evening and deny the light of their countenances to the sober side of the house. So the little conference was broken for the time, and, with Dr. Sales to lead in the talk, Susan found ample retirement within the tabernacle of her own soul. She could seem to listen while she kept on thinking, and though she was a hopeful girl, and generally saw the bright side of the picture, it must be confessed there was a little darkness that night in her heart as well as in the garden. And I think there are few so light and happy as to be utterly unmoved by such ominous silence of an old schoolmate and friend to say nothing of the nearer association of helper and occasional correspondent. And when the gray old father prayed for the restoration of the absent, as he had not failed to do for months, Susan was glad that the prayer was long, so that the tears which would flow might find time to dry before anybody could look into her face. As she lay at night on a bed of Wesley's aromatic straw, and courted sleep for hours before it came, her dreams were not all of singing-birds and strawberry meadows.

CHAPTER XXI.

A SOUL REDEEMED.

BUT have you no love for man? You are a priest by nature and ordination, and it seems to me you are not quite converted while you are ready to sit down by the light of the new candle and let these four narrow walls shut in the illumination. This faith, sir, that you are investigating and accepting little by little, has its foundation in God's fatherhood. What does that involve? Evidently the brotherhood of all men. *The brotherhood of all men*, I say. And what does this relationship involve? How are you to feel toward a brother?"

"Love him," said Elder Marks slowly, in answer to the pointed interrogations of Dr. Sales.

"Love him? How much? You are versed in the Scriptures. Tell us how much?"

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself,"—in measured tones, as though weighing inly each heaven-sent word.

"How much do you love yourself? Let me answer that. Your soul was in torment, and you gave yourself utterly to investigations which would tend to bring you rest and peace. You have found that rest for yourself. But the world has not found it. It struggles under an awful burden. It travails in overwhelm-

ing pain. To be sure all men do not feel as intensely as you did the agonies of an application of their dogmas. Simply because they are not such thorough believers as you were. They are generally more selfish — ready to find some loophole of escape for their own. But the world suffers, nevertheless, and you are bound to love it as you do yourself, and therefore labor for its peace as though you were laboring for the peace of your own soul.”

Dr. Sales had touched the right chord. This exile had lived long entirely within himself. And since he began to struggle toward the light he had grasped it as something especially for his own darkness. He had been absorbed in self, forgetting that the dark waters through which he had waded were engulfing their daily victims. He thought for a little time in a wider channel, and began to see that this promised bliss in which he rejoiced as the ultimate inheritance of the world was needed as a present helper in the life that now is. And out of this channel shot another, broad as the race; this truth of brotherhood and the interchange of kindness which it should bring along the pathway of its belief. He thought of the daily help of his two neighbors, and in some sense realized his indebtedness to them as never before, and they were remembered in his thought as brothers of a common household. All the world needed the same spirit. The cry of pain whether of soul or body should have instant answer. It was not enough that bliss at last should fall to the lot of all men. It was not enough to sit down and wrap the mantle of satisfaction closely while outside were cold and despair.

"You are right, Dr. Sales. We all owe something to our fellows if it is our fortune to have blessings of which they are not partakers. But I have been growing full of bliss at the prospect of what God in mercy has done for the race without thinking of personal responsibility in the matter. I thank you for shocking my soul into a sense of its relationship to man as well as God."

"You talk of God's merciful work. How does God work? Evidently through instrumentalities of some sort, and largely through human help. You remember about the Hebrews — God's chosen people. They had the example and teachings of the Patriarchs. They had Moses and the prophets. And later the world has had Christ and the Apostles. You receive your knowledge of God's will through the teachings of these lights of the world, and especially through Christ, who is *the* light. Now, the Apostles are all dead, and Christ no longer goes about among the people teaching by His words the way of salvation. But the record of eternal life is there, in the Bible. When you know it is there, is it right for you to let it remain a sealed book to your brother man, whom you are commanded to love as you do yourself, when you are especially gifted as a preacher? You don't answer. Is it right, I say, to hide the light under a bushel? If you think it is not right, you have some concern with the body in which your soul lives and should endeavor to restore it to health. If you stay here alone you will never get well. You must go out-doors. Now put on your coat and hat. We have a good easy wagon outside, and Sanford will cure you in a week in his little Vinetown nest."

George Marks did as Dr. Sales told him, without another word of remonstrance, and what had been to Dr. Sanford an impossible thing because he made his appeals directly to the physical man without giving any soul-need either of himself or the world as a reason, was readily accomplished by the old physician through calling the sick man outside of himself to a world in need.

There was now quite a little family in the new house on the Alleghany, and Susan turned housekeeper too, and by their united hands the four men were cared for, and the reward of daily improvement in the invalid was very precious to those who had undertaken his restoration. They daily walked with him in the garden and about the narrow streets of the village, and as far up the winding mountain paths as his strength would admit of his going. At evening they discussed theology, especially in its relations to life and work, which was the aspect most pleasing to Dr. Sales, and which he said was likely to be undervalued, while the new believer stood in ecstatic joy before the glorious vision of a world redeemed at last. Elder Marks, as he was called by the household, grasped eagerly each new suggestion and followed it in all its bearings upon human responsibility. And as his strength gradually increased, a purpose was ripening which should bring blossoms and fruit within the reach of other hands than his own. The relationship of brother to all men was stirring his slumbering powers with a desire to be a helper and benefactor. When in the past he had felt the heaviness of the burden, "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel," it was because of the threatening woe

hanging over the heads of the race, which his timely warning might avert. Now he felt, indeed, that he could not be happy in utter silence, but how different the cause! In his heart he carried a pearl of great price which was not more his than it was his neighbor's, and he could not rest in peace while his neighbor remained ignorant of his inheritance. The love born of faith in brotherhood was reaching out its conscious arms to embrace the world, and while any whom he had the power to reach groped in darkness he could not be entirely glad. How fast he grew outwardly under the guidance of these men whose work among the suffering had taught them such lessons of the hunger and trouble so common in life! A week had been to his soul like a whole summer's growth to the fields, and the promise of harvest was beautiful and abundant. He found his truest joy now not in thinking continually of the release to his lost Ada, which the assurance of his faith had brought him, but in laying plans to carry this faith to others who were not his wife to be sure, but God's children quite as much as she; and therefore his family to whom he owed a debt which could only be liquidated when he had done all in his power to bear the riches of the gospel to them.

There was no hesitancy in speaking their honest convictions in presence of Loudon Sanford. He listened, but since that night years ago when he listened to the talk of Rachel and Wesley, he had not argued. It seemed to impress him seriously, the fact of Elder Marks' conversion, and the enthusiasm with which he talked of the bliss of this change. Loudon remembered distinctly his warnings when Mr. Stacy

preached to a handful in the school-house with light in its windows, and he thought if Wesley and such a man as Elder Marks were believers, there was nothing to fear from the influence of this faith, and there must be some power in it to bring about such changes as he had witnessed.

Few circles could be gathered anywhere even now, in which more mental acumen, and honest, hearty investigation would be possible than in this one, where men whose souls had struggled out of dense darkness traced the rays of light as they search all the ways of human life, and illumine its gloomiest passages, and centre in the source of all light, where the supply is inexhaustible though "darkness covered the whole earth, and gross darkness all the people."

But Dr. Sales' promised week came to an end. The little circle must be contracted somewhat. Mercy was not willing to spare Susan, and Susan saw that she was really needed now that so much care had been added to the house. The old doctor, who had been like a father to this orphan, was consulted in the matter, and he looking on all sides of the question, thought it best for Susan to stay, though he said he should "miss a very bright star in the heaven of his home."

"And I shall miss my best friend," said Susan, in the enthusiasm of the moment. Whereupon Mercy looked up in her face as though to ask if she had been dethroned — and Susan added, "among men, dear Mercy. Dr. Sales is my father. You are my sister."

"Ah, little one, did you think Sue loved nobody but you? You are mistaken. She has promised to ask my consent before she transfers the claims of her

gray old father to anybody else. She is my girl, as sure as the world, and I'm going to leave her my vast estate. But she shall stay with you now, seeing you have that handsome priest to take care of, only look out, Susy — his eyes are to be avoided as you value the peace of your soul!" And with gay words to the women — to keep them from *crying*, you see, and a most hearty good-bye to the men, Dr. Sales rode away leading Susan's horse, and they watched him until he had crossed the ferry and was slowly climbing a spur of the Alleghanies on the other side.

CHAPTER XXII.

TIDINGS.

LETTERS reached their destination in the course of time, even before the advent of railroads. But we can all of us easily understand that it took a much longer time in those slow days than it does now, when the continent is ribbed and veined with iron rails. Dr. Sanford came in from his never-ending care of the sick and dropped upon the supper-table three letters. This was really an advent in the days of stage-coaches and twenty-five cent letters. Mercy and Susan darted toward the table. Women do just so to this day. Mr. Gough might call it "curiosity," but I think it is a kind of soul-hunger which these precious bits of paper help to allay, but never come in sufficient length or numbers to really satisfy. We have all seen our wives and sisters grasp for the letters when we struggled home from the office holding our umbrella against the wind, and sometimes in their eagerness they open ours too. Had the day been fine we should have read them all on the street, doubtless, without looking at the address. Well, that is just as it should be. If the family would be happy it must be confiding. The minute we begin to hide anything, one from another, that minute the cloven foot of distrust

and jealousy stamps about the house, and we hear it continually, even in the sacred precincts of our sanctum, where profane feet are not allowed to enter. The way to keep them out is not to shut the door of the sanctum, but to open the door of the heart. Keep it open, and singularly enough all is calm and divinely silent. The very air drops peace.

But who wrote the letters Dr. Sanford laid upon the supper-table? Susan has slipped one of them into her pocket. We shall have to guess at that. Susan is reticent; a woman who can keep her own secrets. Mercy holds another in her little fingers, and looks at her father while he adjusts his spectacles and breaks the seal of the third. He knows on the instant whose hand has touched the paper, and a tremor of joy thrills him that his son whom he thought dead is alive again. "Is it from Charles?" Mercy asks. Wesley had seen the hand and knew it was that of Charles, so he answered her while Loudon read on, not seeming to hear. Then they waited silently until he had finished reading and laid the letter on the table. As they took it up he went into his little bedroom, and the murmur of a prayer, which was more of a thanksgiving, softly reached them, while they too read and were glad that Charles was alive and had a place where to work. Mercy hunted for Susan to tell her the joyful news — Susan had disappeared from the first — and she could not find her about the house. An hour afterwards she saw her coming down the mountain path with Elder Marks, and a look was on her face neither sorrowful nor glad. She had sought the stillest corner of the world in which to read her

letter, and the priest had come in her way as he returned with his gun from a whole day's ramble in the woods. Mercy could not wait their slow approach. She went to meet them, and shouted gaily, "we have heard from Charles, and he is well."

Somehow Susan did not seem so rejoiced at this news as would have been natural under the circumstances, but inquired abruptly from whom Mercy's letter had come.

"I had forgotten all about it. We are so glad Charles is alive and well. Let us sit down here and read it, Susy."

"No, you can't see. The sun is a long way down. Let us go in."

"Well, I think we had better. There is the supper all cold by this time. Nobody has thought of eating. We shall have something good to-morrow, shan't we, Elder? What a string of squirrels!"

"I hope you have something good to-night, Mrs. Sanford. I am hungry as a wolf. These rambles are fast curing me, and then I will work — O, so faithfully."

Mercy poured the tea and then read her letter amid exclamations of joy which were not meant to be audible, but letters were so rare, that if this little wife did rejoice aloud amid the sentences, it is quite a pardonable offence. And then she had a rare letter. I don't think even Susan's contained so good news. I want to transcribe it here word for word, though I am well aware that it is best as a general rule to keep our letters as private property. It was dated on the "borders of Palestine," and addressed to Mercy, who was not

called by name, but by a pet name which she seemed to understand. We have spoken of her cherry cheeks. After the fearful fever they came back to her in all their glory. She grew very fleshy, and very red in the face, and Thomas Jones called her "Cherry." So when the letter began by calling her "Little Cherry," there was a chance for a bubble of joy at the very first, and it grew more and more to the very last.

"We have finished the house and are in it. There are two rooms, and a lean-to, which is divided into little bedrooms, and a buttery, too, for the milk of our six cows. Mary has a carpet on one of the rooms, and we call it our parlor. She made it all with her own hands. Then such a quantity of mats, some of them big enough to cover the floor of the bedrooms, as Mary brought out, was enough to astonish anybody who does not know my wife is a very industrious woman.

"The wheat-harvest has been remarkably good, and the corn top, and we shall have more than we know what to do with of potatoes and turnips and beets. And we don't know how many chickens we have, nor how many turkeys either. I saw your father and mother not long ago in C ——. They had gone to trade, I guess, for their wagon was piled full. I rode up and inquired if they were well, just because I wanted you to know, and Eunice did really ask about you, and I thought Horace looked as though he was glad to hear, but he did not say so. Isadore is more poorly than she used to be, but Horace said she had a great tearing boy three months old, and no wonder she was poorly.

"Little Cherry, we've got something else new besides a house and flocks of chickens and turkeys. We have got a new cradle, made of willow and very pretty, and Mary sits by it a good deal with her toe on the rocker. But I tell you she don't rock the cradle empty. There's the pinkest little boy lying on the pillows you ever saw — a little mite of a thing not a moon old; not so old as the chickens, but he is somewhat bigger than they are. He cries a good deal, but we think the noise of a baby is company for us, and so long as he can't talk yet we are glad he cries. We are about the happiest folks in the world now. Plenty of everything, a new house and a new baby; and Mary declares the Lord has prospered us because you were here so long. She thinks you are specially guarded, and the spirit which follows you everywhere abode still in the house after you went away. We have talked about a name, and I can't find anything equal to the merits of my baby, but Mary says he must be called Thomas, after his father. So you see there is a prospect of Tom Jones staying in the world for some time to come."

Mercy handed the letter to her husband, and they rejoiced together over the fortune of their friends. They had refused any compensation for the months of care bestowed upon Mercy, and this news was especially pleasant to them on that account. She had been afraid the long sickness might delay the new house, but it had come a year sooner than they intended, so it was evident they were not crippled by outlays made for her, and the vision of Mary Jones with her toe on a cradle-rocker was really quite startling and not unpleasant.

"Thomas Jones," said Elder Marks, as he heard Wesley speak the name, "does he live in Otsego?"

"He did; but he has emigrated to the promising West."

"I shall never forget Thomas Jones. Passing through the Sanford neighborhood one day, I saw a fine-looking man drawing water from a well. It was warm, and though I had not thought before of being thirsty, the sight of the water made me desire it, and I hitched my horse and went to the well. Jones handed me his cup most heartily and I drank. It was always my custom to inquire concerning the souls of all persons with whom I came in contact, and on returning the cup I asked this man if he was a Christian.

"'I am very happy to give you the water, sir,' he said.

"Thinking him deaf, and understanding his answer as a response to what he supposed to be thanks for the water, I raised my voice and repeated the question, '*Are you a Christian?*' Again he answered, 'I am very happy to give you the water, sir.' 'But you don't understand me,' I replied still louder, and putting my mouth close to his ear I thundered out again, '*ARE YOU A CHRISTIAN? IS YOUR SOUL SAFE?*' With the same imperturbable look he replied, 'I think it is, so long as I am happy in giving you the water, sir.'

"'What do you mean? Are you deaf?' I asked, hardly knowing what to think of his replies.

"'I am not at all deaf, and I mean just what I say. I took you to be a priest, by your question, and if you are, you have probably read the Bible enough to know

what Christ says about the "reward" for giving even a cup of cold water, though perhaps you may not know just how that reward comes. I dare say you don't know. Your debt and credit system has no reckoning day on earth. I suppose you think that reward is something people get in eternity. But eternity is a long time to wait. And you are mistaken in that as you are in most of your notions. I'll tell you how it comes and when. If you do a good act from good motives you are happy. The reward is within you, and it comes on the instant. There's no debt and credit about it. That is not the way the Lord deals. He pays down for everything his children do, the wicked things, too, as well as the good.'

"My friend," said I, 'your reasoning would do away with the endless rewards and endless punishment in God's government. I don't think you can be serious in saying we get pay for all the sins we commit.'

"I am entirely serious, and my reasoning don't do away with anything God has established. It only topples over priestly notions. Your endless punishment is a human invention. It grew up amid other heathen notions; and if either of us can be properly questioned as to whether he is a Christian, I think it is you if you believe in that relic of heathenism. I do not. I think God had some other purpose in view when he made me than just the creation of fuel for a great fire.'

"But there's a way of escape," said I. 'This doom is not inevitable. By repentance and faith it may be averted.'

"Look here, parson," said he, 'Mary has dinner all ready, and if you'll go in I'll divide my crust with you,

but I shall not be likely to repent doing it, or giving you the water, either.'

"O, no, of course you will not repent of that. We are not called to repent of our good deeds, but our evil deeds.'

"O, I know what you preach. Not longer ago than last Sunday you told the people they could not do a good deed in a state of nature; and I am not aware of being in any other state. According to your theory I should need to repent of giving you a dinner quite as much as though I had given you a thrashing.'

"I confess I was perplexed by the man's replies. I did not go with him to dinner, but stopped with a brother in the neighborhood, where I found out his name, and they told me no man could say he ever did a mean action, but he had singular views of life and duty, which I had evidence of in our conversation. I can see now, doctor, how far in advance of mine were his theories. I wish I could have seen then. Years of sorrow and loss might have been turned into hope and usefulness. The desert of my life might have been a garden. But I will not repine. Doubtless, suffering has made me stronger for the battle which I must wage, and if Christ 'was made perfect through suffering, we should count it all joy to be worthy of stripes.'"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE NEW FAITH IN VINETOWN.

ONE crisp morning in the fitful winter which comes to the latitude of which I write, as the men of Vinetown crept out to look after their week-day work, they were attracted by what looked like bits of paper nailed to fence-posts in several places along the village treet, and, wading through the fleecy snow, they sought a position near enough to decipher the writing, which was just visible upon them. Every post and rail and bush had its ermine border. So had the bits of paper; and this evanescent ermine was damp "with the dew of night," or its own inherent dew; so the notice was blurred and indistinct. But these men could read through the indistinctness, and it was not an advertisement of "Lost," or "Found." Elder Marks would preach on the following Sunday at the village school-house. This was a pleasant announcement. Meetings were not very plenty. Some of them had seen this priest climbing the mountain with his gun, but they knew nothing about him, only that he was at Dr. Sanford's for medical treatment. They had heard him called "Elder," and were all glad he was well enough to preach to them. The circuit ministers did not come every Sunday, even to charming Vinetown, now that

winter was upon all the land. Vinetown was not easy of access, with its unbridged river and its mountain bulwarks.

Sunday came slowly to the few who had seen and admired this man at a distance, and desired to see him nearer and know him better. These were perhaps nearly all women. Men don't care much about beauty in their own sex, and are not quick to discern it. I believe this rule works both ways. My wife often tells me that such a one of our acquaintance is a "handsome man," but if I prolong the interesting conversation by calling her attention to some pretty girl, I find to my astonishment that she is quite oblivious to the beauty which I see, if she does not utterly deny its existence. I think, however, that this is a wise arrangement of nature. It would be very sad, indeed, if women were sufficiently susceptible of beauty in their own sex, to envy the faces of the surpassing fair. I am glad my wife is not. Fortunately for me she is one of those women whom nobody considers handsome until they have known her for a series of years. I say fortunately; for if the world looked upon her as I do, I shouldn't have a wife, but the united kingdoms would have a queen, so vast and sweeping would be their idolatry.

Yes, Sunday came slowly, but it came. The whole week had been cold enough to keep the sleighing good, and all who had heard of the meeting, and were too weak, or lived too far to walk, came on sleds drawn by goodly yokes of red and speckled oxen. The oxen were easily harnessed, and the sled would hold the whole family. Curled up on the aromatic hay which

served for cushions, and for the hungry cattle's food they went cozily, and felt not the crisp air. Not so swift of foot as the horse, but surer in rough places, the ox is relied upon in new and mountainous countries as the farmer's trusty and strong helper. Besides Dr. Sanford's there were not many horses kept in the village. The people were of simple habits, and their wants did not reach far beyond the neighborhood, which had its sufficient store of dry goods and groceries, and two busy mills, where material was prepared for the house the body lives in, and to keep in order the temple of the soul.

When stillness reigned in the school-house, because the people were all in their seats, on looking over the congregation it seemed large for such a place. Every seat was full, and a few children, for want of better places, dropped down on the steps which led into the "master's desk,"—that day the minister's pulpit. Elder Marks cast but a single glance about the room to assure himself that the oppressive silence was not utter vacancy, and then dropping his eyes upon the children at his feet he stood up to read. Whether by association with the smiling group crouched so near him, or simply accidentally, he opened and read, "Suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of Heaven;" only this one verse, and nothing more. His mind seemed to be arrested in its purpose of following the custom of reading a chapter from the Scriptures by the single verse on which his eye had just fallen. He forgot the order common in religious services, and immediately commenced commenting upon this passage.

Every eye was upon him, riveted from the first by the spirit and power of his speech.

It is many years since then, and I have not the fullest outline of the sermon, but from the description of its thought furnished by one who listened in rapt wonder and joy, I judge it to have been remarkable in conception and full of power, which the hearers felt to their inmost hearts.

The likeness of the heavenly kingdom to the innocence and trust of little children furnished an ample field for the sweep of his thought, which revelled so gladly in the great truth of fraternity and brotherhood; and he enforced man's relationship to God, and to his brother man, with a power and pathos quite convincing to the unprejudiced mind. But what was singular, and at the same time overwhelming, in his treatment of the passage was a masterly rebuke delivered to all classes of men who in any way place obstructions between the human soul and its Heavenly Father.

"Suffer the little child to come," said he, "don't keep him away by your cold distrust. Tell him of the Heavenly Father whom Christ revealed, in such winning and simple phrase as shall cultivate his confidence and reliance. He understands the meaning of the relationship of father and child. He loves and trusts the father who provides shelter and raiment for him. He will love and trust the great God who gives us the world and all its charming garniture of beauty and usefulness if he learns of Him through Christ the beloved Son. He taught us of God the Father. In this character the simplest child can know something of His greatness, something of His goodness. But this lesson

of our subject is not alone for the child in stature and years. The babes who came to Christ, and whose mothers were rebuked by the disciples, are not the only children whom professed disciples have rebuked and kept away from the Redeemer. The priests of the New Covenant, which speaketh better things than that of Abel, ordained to teach the gospel to men, and win them to its faith and service, have depicted the character of God, the giver of the gospel, and all other good which we enjoy, in such fearful colors that men have turned away in terror, and too often in despair. 'Suffer the little child to come,' says Jesus, speaking as the minister and revelator of God's will. Place no obstructions in the way of his feet. Place no barrier in the way of his soul's love and aspiration. Mountain walls are easier overleaped than a portraiture of God which shocks the soul and awakens its repugnance. It is impossible for men to come to Christ in the attitude of true discipleship, while the cords with which we seek to draw them are twisted of anything but love. The priesthood of the world stands under the condemnation of Christ. Their sermons are heavy with threatened woe, and dark with the frowns of unloving judgment. The yearning heart of the world, reaching out after a father, and seeking the rest of his bosom is rebuked in its native trust by these awful pictures. It recoils, it turns away, heavy and sad. Christ is not at hand to say, as he said to the disciples when they would shut out the children who thronged to receive His blessing, 'Rebuke them not!' but the spirit of His gospel whispers, — yes, thunders, — the same rebuke to-day to all who, standing in the place of followers of

Him, tell the world that he is other than a father to the worst prodigal that wears His image."

The sermon closed by a prayer to "Our Father in Heaven," so full of the child's simple faith, that many left the place of worship, feeling a serene trust quite unknown before.

But the stinging rebuke which he delivered found its way to the ears of the circuit-preachers. There were some among his listeners whose native trust had been shaken by creeds, and they sifted his words, and doubted their truth, and in the midst of the agitation caused by the new power in Vinetown sought counsel of the clergy. Before the grape blossomed in the following spring a spirit of opposition was sufficiently ripe to take form in deeds. And when the Elder who had followed his first sermon with line upon line at every opportunity went on Sunday to his accustomed place, a crowd stood about the door of the school-house, and the door was shut. It was bolted too, and barred, like a prison-window. The trustees of the place had done it, so there was authority behind the act. Some of the men advised breaking the bars. But Dr. Sanford said there was another place, not quite so commodious, perhaps, but it would shelter them from the rain, which was drizzling coldly; and they followed his lead, and that day's worship was offered from the new house on the Alleghany.

Afterwards the doctor and the minister held a council. It would soon be warm enough to sit on the mountain-side, as did Christ with his disciples, but summer would not last the year round. Men cannot burrow up during the winter and live without sustenance.

They ought not to starve the soul in any season or latitude, because no place is found where to spread the feast. Let the women bring their jewels, and the men tribute from their flocks and herds, and build to the Lord a house. Alas! the women of Vinetown had no jewels, and the men needed their oxen to plough the fields, and their sheep for clothing.

"I think it cannot be done, Dr. Sanford. The few who would like to give are too poor. If you undertake it, you will have to build the house almost single-handed, I fear."

"I will build a house unto the Lord, where my faith in God and man can be freely advocated, if no hand helps me!"

"But you are just starting in life; you cannot, doctor. At least you ought not."

"Life! my life is not alone my practice, nor my home with its daily bread. My faith is my life. And I serve myself as truly in building the temple of faith as in building the temple of home. I should have no home worth the name if it were not consecrated by a faith which bridges sorrow, and even death."

"Your enthusiasm is grand, doctor. If your purse were heavy enough to help you embody it in form I would be the last man to check it. But if you undertake this work now you may impoverish your home, where the truest duty of man lies. 'He that provides not for his own has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.'"

"But I will provide for my own while I provide for the community. That is the way life's truest blessings come to us. We do what we can to help

men, and the very endeavor enlarges and helps us more."

"I do not doubt that your heart, which I reckon great enough now, will be enlarged and enriched by the offering which you propose to lay upon the altar of God — the altar of humanity. I am not thinking of the life out of sight, but of the coat which you must have to keep your body warm, and the bread for yourself and family."

"‘Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.’ I have faith that we shall not lack any of these things while I remember the soul which is more than its temple."

"I shall not stay to lead this flock alone even though you build the most comely fold. I must climb the mountains and explore the wilderness for the lost sheep. Some seed has fallen here, and the faithful will nourish it into life. I must go where the darkness is denser. Vinetown needs no other gospel light than that reflected by its physician. You will mould this people into faithful disciples, such as I hope to be. And what I am under God, you have made me."

"We will trust heaven for the light. When the windows are set in His house he will illumine them. Some hand will hold up the candle of the Lord. Of that I have neither doubt nor fear."

This purpose of Dr. Sanford's was not the enthusiasm of the moment. It was born suddenly, indeed, but it was one of those flashes of inspiration which reveal avenues by which the wrath of man can be turned into praise.

Elder Marks, true to the promise of his restoration, went about through all the land of Pennsylvania teaching and preaching that the kingdom of Heaven is at hand. And the home of the doctor missed him for long intervals, and the few who saw gleams of light missed him, and Susan, the orphan, missed him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RETURN OF THE SCHOLAR.

OLD Peter Knight and his wife, Anne, packed very carefully the saddle-bags of the young schoolmaster, who was about to cross the border, and ascertain by personal observation what sort of a place was the valley of the Alleghany, and how he should like turning up the soil of the new farm. This honest family had been true friends to the stranger, and they were heartily sorry to see these preparations for departure.

Charles Sanford had been a light in their house. Through his influence a sense of the degradation of ignorance and a love for knowledge had been awakened in Peter and Samuel. The old man loved books himself, and read the English classics like an enthusiast. But his praise of Milton and Shakespeare had never touched a responsive chord in the hearts of his boys. It remained for the Yankee teacher to win them to the fountains of knowledge and lead the way. Now they were swallowed up in books. This the father liked, even though it sometimes interfered with the business plans which embraced his sons. He was willing to forego aid from them, knowing that their time was all given to self-improvement. Another year under the same tuition was greatly desired, and stren-

uous efforts had been used to induce Charles to remain with them. But the plea of age had touched his heart more tenderly, as it came from his own father, and to him both love and duty prompted a response.

Loudon Sanford yearned for his son. A teacher could be obtained for the village school, but a stranger could not fill the place of child in the heart of the father. Money, with which they tried to tempt him, weighed nothing when in the balance with filial love, especially as he reflected that that love had been long suffering for him. So the resolve to "arise and go to his father" was taken, in a spirit which no temptation could sway, and though sorrow plead eloquently, love was strongest, and they reluctantly helped him to make ready for the journey.

There was hearty sorrow in other homes besides that of Peter Knight. A general interest had been awakened in education by the enthusiastic young teacher, and, naturally, love and reverence clung about the man who had quickened into more active life the noble springs of intellect. So clear-headed, and so far above common men, did these Canadians regard young Sanford that they were ready to acknowledge his superiority and do him homage. His position among them was such as to gratify in a measure the ambition for leadership which characterized Charles, and yet when he reflected how poor and backward in all that ennoble the intellectual man these patrons and admirers were, he aspired for different associates, and the appreciation and praise of a nobler class of people. To be thought greatest of all the men in the village was pleasant, to be sure, and a measure of gratification at-

tended the assurance, but aspiration and desire were not satisfied. There were higher places in the social scale, and the echo of admiration from these would be clearer and louder. And so the homage of this entire Canadian village was looked upon as a stepping-stone to something higher, where aspiration should have a more satisfying answer.

But as Charles Sanford went out from this spot, which had been his home for a whole year, he left an indelible impress upon the plastic minds of his pupils, very grateful to him as a testimony of success in the great work of a teacher. And to them he was enshrined as the inspiration of a life larger than that which sits idly down among material gifts to eat and drink and sleep. They had been moved to inquire of the past, how the world kept up its revolutions, bringing seed-time and harvest, and how the men and women worked and looked in mother England in the days of Elizabeth and Anne. This wider vision brought such sweet compensations that we do not wonder he who unsealed their intellectual eyes was revered by old and young, and remembered and sorrowed for in other homes than that of Peter Knight.

Still the future had its beckoning finger for the pupils and to the teacher, and while they looked forward to the time when they should have grown into greater wisdom, he shot the arrow of hope far ahead on each day's journey, and saw visions larger and fairer than any in the past, and was glad of the new scenes constantly opening before him.

And, by and by, another expectant and ambitious heart had crossed the "borders of Palestine," and the

place made vacant in the new house on the Alleghany by the departure of the teacher of faith was filled by the teacher of mathematics, and their sorrow for the stranger was so speedily followed by joy over the return of the son that the lives of this family hardly felt a ripple, but flowed on like the river swelled to its utmost by the melted snows and all the little mountain brooks set free by the spring sunshine.

The family was happy, quietly and deeply happy, over Charles' return. But Charles was not quite satisfied with his reception by all the house. Susan did not run to him with the same free and hearty manner which used to please him so when she dropped the distaff and came to inquire about the sums. Several letters had passed between them, in which the young man had spoken freely of his work and his aspirations, and perhaps he had meant more than he had said. Susan had not gathered sufficient confidence from these to make her very much at ease in his presence. And then he had changed so with the years. When they last met Charles was a boy in his teens, with all the freshness and frankness of that early season. Now he was a man of fine person and graceful manners. His address was that of the man who has mingled much in society, and whose angularities have been rounded by the contact. A year in Europe could hardly have done more for him than this year among an ignorant people who had by common consent revered him as greatest. Something in the position, doubtless, had smoothed and ripened him, so that even his father who had seen him latest could not help observing it. With a heart-beat of satisfaction he was reminded of the ancestral

grace of his family, and glad to see it blossom still, though the tree had been transplanted from a cultivated garden to a primeval wilderness. There were no traces of his life at the rickety inn upon the fine face of Charles. The influence of home-life at Peter Knight's had long ago obliterated the last vestige of these.

He seemed very noble and strong and far off to Susan. His very graces were like mountain barriers. Not that she, too, had not ripened with the years. She had. The thoughtful and studious girl had become a woman, whose fine sense and keen intuitions made ample recompense for any lack of external graces. But in contrast with Charles she was painfully conscious of the lack, nevertheless, and it made her more and more retiring day after day until young Sanford had quite concluded that his hopes were utterly dethroned.

When he came in from his long day's labor on the farm, a little tired with the walk as well as the work, and withal hungry for homage, and looked in vain into Susan's face for any intimation of the worship which he craved, there was a heart-sinking and mortification of spirit which did not help to make the valley of the Alleghany a very happy spot.

In vain he watched for a sign of the current of Susan's heart, fully believing that woman cannot exist in a normal state without being "in love." But the young men of Vinetown were as much in awe of the single woman at Dr. Sanford's as they were of the doctor himself. They did not drop in on Sundays, and poor Charles watched in vain in that direction.

Night after night he entertained the house with stories of his exploits, related in choice and elegant language, thinking he would surely make his mark in this way, but all the time he was only making the mountain higher. Susan listened with the rest, but if her eye brightened, bent over her work as it was, he did not see it.

By-and-by, when the summer was in full flush, Elder Marks returned to Vinetown to preach to the people. He came straight to his old home. It was night when he arrived, and the circle was gathered about the open door listening to Charles the gifted. There was enough moonlight streaking under the vines, and glinting about the yard, to reveal him as soon as he had passed the gate. In an instant Mercy and Susan flew down the path to greet him. He walked toward the door with these women on either side. Charles was astonished that anybody should receive so warm a greeting. He remembered distinctly that Susan did not run to meet him. Then the doctor, too, showed unusual joy, and so did the old father.

And this was the priest, was it? Strange he had not thought before, when he had heard him so often quoted by the family! Of course there must be a very strong attachment to warrant such demonstrative joy.

Lights were set upon the little round table, and Charles saw the man fully and fairly, but he did not greet him very cordially after the formal introduction. His rapid thinking had taken away some of his accustomed grace. The family saw this and began to explain about their guest, extolling him quite as much

as they could in his presence. Charles evidently understood that he was the priest who had lived so long in his brother's house, but he did not soften any toward him. He could not help seeing that the guest was no mean specimen of his race, and the very fact of his beauty and majestic presence was a confirmation of his intuitive suspicion.

Undoubtedly this priest had stolen Susan's heart, and that was why she was so immovable when he did his very best to make an impression!

Charles watched the interest written upon her face while Elder Marks recounted incidents of his missionary labors. He had never seen her kindle so at *his* stories. She had never looked so beautiful either as when her strong face had this light of sympathetic interest in it. Though for that Charles did not care so much. He worshipped mind more than body—the sense and sentiment of the book more than its pretty cover. But if her face had brightened so for him his heart would have leaped for joy.

Sunday came, and a little flock gathered on the side of the mountain. There were no bolts nor bars to shut them out of this primeval temple. Its arches bent lovingly over them; its leafy pillars were grateful on this summer day as the shadow of a rock in a weary land. Charles was there, but not as a listener. In the unnatural condition of mind which his suspicions had caused he was quite unfit to listen. He sat apart and noted the interest with which the congregation listened. Especially did he watch the lines on the face of Susan Rice. Ever since she heard the ministers whose appearance in the groves of Ohio was

like angels' visits she had given a rapt attention to the Sunday service quite impossible before. In fact her interest in such themes had never until then been awakened. Now she weighed carefully the logic of the preacher and sifted his ideas. She was an absorbed hearer, no matter what the *ism* or fellowship of the speaker. She always listened so, with her face lifted and her eyes upon the minister.

But Charles thought as he looked again and again, and saw no change of attitude, saw no change at all except in the color of her cheek and the light of her eyes, that this priest was especially interesting. And so he was. To him Susan listened with joyous assent. The faith he defended found a hearty response from the deepest recesses of her soul. Even its utmost conclusions were accepted as possibly practical. And when the love of God for all men, even the unthankful and the evil, which Elder Marks had enforced with masterly power, was presented as a test of discipleship in those words of Christ, "I say unto *you* love your enemies, that ye may be like your Father in Heaven," Susan thought even that requirement, though a severe one in some circumstances, she could fulfil; and she knew that Mercy never felt any other than a loving spirit toward her enemies. And so she reasoned if one or two could keep the command, it was possible for all when their hearts had been touched by the conviction of the brotherhood of all men.

While the little flock wended toward the smiling homes dotting the green valley Charles followed the river course, and they missed him from his accustomed place at the little round table. It was the first

time he had been absent, but the day was warm and they thought he had sought the shelter of the woods for its cooling and refreshing spirit. They were not disturbed by his absence until night came and he did not return. Then they feared he might have wandered in the woods and lost his way.

The small wheat-field of Loudon Sanford was ripe for the harvest. He was too old to reap it, and expected Charles to begin the task early on Monday morning; but Charles was not in the field. At noon the old father seemed sadly apprehensive. Charles was certainly lost in the long reaches of forest which stretched away on either side of the Alleghany. He thought best that the doctor should hunt for him; but Dr. Sanford said Charles knew the sky too well to get lost in the woods in clear weather.

"Where is he if not lost?" was the cry of the anxious father. But the doctor did not relish the idea of alarming the neighborhood and hunting for a grown man. He said, "Wait a little while before we noise the matter abroad. He may have purposes of which we are not aware which require his presence in another town."

"But he would not go away in the midst of harvest-time!"

"You forget, father, that Charles has been a farmer so little time he is hardly yet harnessed into the care. I have no doubt he will show himself some time to-day. Let the wheat wait for him. Don't tire your back over it."

"If it were not for my appointment in Bolton tonight I would work in your field. I should like to.

But Bolton is ten miles off, and it will require a good part of the afternoon to get there."

"Do the people turn out to week-evening meetings, Elder?"

"Yes, they come from all the regions round about; and so far even harvest-time has not thinned the congregation."

At about the same hour the priest and the doctor started on their different circuits, and when they were fairly gone Susan put on her sunbonnet and slipped out for a walk, not on any street of Vinetown, nor along the margin of the river, but up the side of the Alleghanies.

CHAPTER XXV.

CHANGES IN THE OHIO COLONY.

JOHN SMITH, after the advent of an heir to his possessions, grew more and more greedy of gain. He engaged in speculations involving larger consequences than a single horse-trade. He made money very fast, and grew somewhat intoxicated with his success.

Horace Ryder saw in his son John a remarkably acute and lucky man of business. His eyes were dazzled by the returns which came to his investments. They were so much heavier than even "a hundred-fold" harvest. And Horace ventured a little with his own surplus funds. It was a very pleasant amusement to him, especially as Smith managed the wires, and he only had to count the returns. The gold he thus counted seemed clear gain. He had neither ploughed nor reaped to gain it. It came in addition to the price-current of wheat and pork.

By-and-by Canfield, a little slow to be converted, brought forward his contribution. The three formed a firm, and invested heavily, and went on swimmingly. They distanced all rivals. They ventured farther than old speculators dared to. The surplus funds became too little to carry on the ambitious affair. They

saw a chance of greatly increased gains by increasing the investment.

"I think we had better hold on to the land, John; we are doing very well, now."

"I think we'd better make this strike while we can. If we do, in a few years we shall have enough to retire on, and live in ease the rest of our days. Why, only think! We've doubled on all our investments. Let's put in the whole, and when we double on that we shall be rich enough."

"I don't believe your father will be willing to mortgage his farm."

"Yes, he will. He is perfectly crazy at the way we are making money. Let's go and talk it over with the old man."

Dennis Canfield and John Smith repaired to the house of Horace Ryder. They talked the matter over. As John had said, Horace was "perfectly crazy." He did not see the least danger, but already began to count up the results, and estimate his wealth when his estate should have doubled.

They made the venture; and John Smith, who knew all about its intricacies, while the others were silent partners, watched the fluctuations of trade and looked on the bright side in all his talk. But he was a little burdened by the weight of the concern. It was rather heavier than acute John could handle easily. He could not make the quick returns which he had always made before. He could not guide his coach-and four as easily as little Horace's baby-wagon. However, matters went on, rather clumsily, to be sure, but during the first year there was no breaking of tires. Horace in-

quired about the returns, but was not cast down when assured that they had been a little slow in coming in. He thought about his oxen heavily loaded. They were a little slow in coming in. And the prospect of a big load when it did come made him patient.

"I suppose we could afford to give Mercy a little something, Horace, when we double the whole. They are very poor, I dare say. And when we get so rich we shall feel ashamed to have poor relations. No doubt that Sanford tells everybody his wife is a daughter of Horace Ryder."

"I suppose we could afford to, but we shall never do it. If we helped them once we should have to do it again; and no knowing but we should have them to maintain. Mercy deserves a life of poverty for the way she managed; and when we double our money I don't think we had better grow soft over it."

"Just as you say, Horace. I was only thinking what a mortification it would be to us to have them pointed out to everybody as our relations."

"It won't hurt us any so long as we are a hundred miles apart."

"No knowing but they will be out to C—. visiting. I heard Miss Doan say at the Quarterly Meeting that Dr. Sales went to see them last year. And if they should come there looking shabby, and our friends, the Doans and Snickers, should see them, they'd think we ought to help them, especially now we've doubled on our money."

"Well, I guess we're not going to run after them, and ask them if they are coming to Dr. Sales' visiting, and then send them money to fix up with if the Doans

and Snickers do see them. You told Miss Doan all about it, and she'll understand the righteousness of the case. We shall retire and live at ease on our money, and not trouble our heads about other people."

Horace Ryder's word was law, and his wife was silenced. Still she brooded over the mortification in case Dr. S. and his wife should visit the flourishing town of C—. She looked at it from the standpoint of the doubled estate.

It became necessary in the course of time for John Smith to go to the city. In all his business speculations he had never ventured so far as New York, but it seemed necessary to the success of the great undertaking, which was so unwieldy and slow in its returns, to look a little into the secret springs of the matter.

With many cautions about robbers and pickpockets, he started on his journey. But John, who made friends readily, relieved its tediousness by relating incidents of the astonishing success which had attended his career as a business man. Among other things, he spoke freely of his present errand, and of the many thousand dollars he should carry home with him. His travelling companions seemed as heartily interested as though he were the business partner of each of them. They drew him on to greater revelations. He was the centre of the circle, and soon felt himself quite a lion. Some of the men in his company were small traders going to the city after their yearly stock of goods. Some of them were gentlemen of leisure, going to New York for variety. Life in Cincinnati was a little dull without this occasional relief. They made him their confidant also, and on the way a half

dozen of these men were the inseparable friends of John Smith. They took their meals together. They drank together, that is, the gentlemen of leisure did, and Smith drank with them, lest they should think him unacquainted with the world. They promised to escort him about the city as he was a stranger there. Smith was delighted with this attention, and when they rode in the same carriage from the wharf to the same hotel he was sufficiently elated to feel himself almost a prince.

They escorted him to the business house which he wished to visit, and then withdrew to a respectful distance while he pocketed the expected thousands. Not the doubled estate of all the firm, but what had come of it — just enough to make them whole, that was all. Smith was too much exhilarated by the constant influence of his companions to feel very much disappointed. He thought the world was all before him, and he could try again. But as he wished to stay a few days and look about the city, he wrote a letter home, telling Canfield and Ryder how the affair had come out. He spoke in glowing terms of his traveling companions, and said that they assured him the loss was nothing uncommon. Business men were subject to fluctuations, and no doubt next time he would shear the golden fleece.

Ryder and Canfield did not take the matter in any such cool way. Doubtless they were in their sober senses, and to have the glowing picture they had so often painted fade suddenly from the canvas was a trial heretofore unequalled in the lives of these men. The women, too, mourned over it. The fine things

they had anticipated when their estates should be doubled all vanished in thin air, and Eunice cried, and Isadore scolded, and Miranda grew sick and sent for the doctor.

While they were in this unhappy condition, John, who was not far behind his letter, came suddenly upon the scene with a visage longest of all. They were all together at Father Ryder's when he came, and now that the exhilaration of genteel companionship had passed from him he did not have anything encouraging to offer.

Canfield thought it well if they had saved enough to pay the mortgages on their farms, and as a crumb of comfort to the rest he said so. Then John told them the firm was bankrupt. He did not bring home a "red cent!"

"But what have you done with it?" exclaimed Horace, very white in the face for him.

"I may as well tell the whole," replied John, in a voice which seemed to come from the pit of despair. "It will have to come out; so here it comes. I went about the city and saw the sights with those men I wrote about, the devils! We went into a beautiful place, a great palace, where they handed round fruit and cakes and wine. I was hungry, and these men said it was all free, and I ate all I wanted. After that I remember hearing music, which sounded far off. When I came to myself, which must have been the next day as near as I can tell, I hadn't a red cent, and I couldn't find the place again nor the men who took me there. We're ruined; and I suppose we've got to grin and bear it."

"Ruined, John! Why we have our farms."

"No, madam, we haven't. The farms are mortgaged for more than they'll sell for in ready cash. I tell you we're poor as old Sol, who begged for my coat the other day, — good thing you didn't give it to him, — and we may as well face it first as last."

"Poor! O dear!" sobbed Eunice. "What *shall* we do!" and in the same breath Isadore blurted out that John must have been a great fool to let those smooth fellows rob him, and if there was nobody but him to suffer she should be glad of it!

Miranda lay in a dead faint, and Canfield in trying to restore her got the two mixed somehow, and thought he had lost his wife instead of his farm. Horace had lain down on the lounge and covered his eyes. As he is class-leader we will believe he is praying for strength to sustain him in this unparalleled affliction.

The report of the failure flew like thistle-down. The men who held mortgages on the three farms closed at once, and the next thing we see Canfield is chopping cord-wood; John Smith is clerk at the corner-grocery; and Horace Ryder picks up a living by carrying bundles about town in his one-horse-wagon.

As for the women, who so long had worshipped the golden calf, they moped and repined. Mrs. Canfield rallied first, although she seemed to be the most severely prostrated. Doubtless the flavor of life which her husband brought from contact with nature helped her to hope a little, while she endured.

He came home at nightfall with glowing cheeks, and they counted each day's gain, and used their pennies carefully.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A HIDDEN WOUND.

SUSAN came down from the mountain, where she had passed the afternoon in meditation, and told Mercy she must go back to Dr. Sales's. And when Mercy remonstrated she put in the plea of necessity, which is so powerful in the mouths of women dependent on their own exertions.

Dr. Sanford had tried to get the village-school for her, but there was something about the religion of his house which made the trustees afraid of its inmates, and his endeavors were unsuccessful, while one occupied the place whose education was far inferior to Susan's. And when she made the attempt to become teacher in the adjoining district, and failed, they had persuaded her to tarry with them and feel at ease. After the family became smaller, by the departure of Elder Marks, she knew she was not needed, but had stayed on, month after month, doing what she could to render herself useful, until now she was quite determined to go.

"But our family is as large now as when Elder Marks was here, Susy. You forget that Charley is with us."

"No; but you are accustomed to your place now, and fill it so well that I am quite in the way. And besides, Mercy, I must earn my clothing. Dr. Sanford shall never reckon that among the items of his expenditures."

These were the reasons Susan saw fit to render for her sudden purpose. Perhaps they were her only reasons. We will not be too inquisitive. Now, that she had decided, she was in haste to go.

"You will surely stay until we know something about Charles—until he gets home. Maybe he has gone to Pittsburg after the telescope he talked about the other night, and you'll want to look through it at Venus."

"No, Mercy. To-morrow is stage day, and I shall go to-morrow. Dr. Sales writes that I can have many of my old pupils back again, and some new ones, and it is best for me to go at once."

"Then you have been writing to Dr. Sales about it?"

"I have. It is very pleasant here, and I have been very happy, but I ought not to stay any longer," and Susy, not caring to talk longer about it, slipped up stairs and went about packing her trunk. Now, I suppose some of my readers will say "how did she carry a trunk? You told us she went to Vinetown on horseback." Listen, and I will tell you. Dr. Sales sent it to her in the stage, and he and Mrs. Sales put in with parental care many comforts which Susan had never seen before. For all their kindness the little return she could make by becoming again an inmate of their own house seemed quite inadequate. Especially

when she herself would be helped so much by going. They were old and lonely. She owed them very much for past kindness, and something in the reckonings of the house had made her feel that she should help Dr. Sanford by leaving his family.

His practice was immense, considering the locality, but he was fast showing himself too tender-hearted to collect his bills; and unless they were paid voluntarily and promptly, as too many were not, he let the matter slip, and Susan who was keen-eyed knew about how things stood with her friends. She knew that the meeting-house which the doctor purposed building had not even foundation-stones yet; and it was not from lack of faith or a determination to build. All these little things she had noted, and while she desired to take care of herself, she was not without the inspiration of a hope of being able to help her friends: especially in delicate handiwork, which she felt sure would not come amiss.

Dr. Sanford came in at night, but he had heard nothing of Charles; and when the stage drove along next morning for Susan no word had come from him or about him. The family thought her a little hard-hearted to leave them under such a cloud of anxiety, and Mercy feared the little air-castle she had built for Charles and Susan was only a castle in the air, though she thought she had seen differently in the past.

And Susan crossed the ferry and was gone from the home she had brightened for so many months.

At the end of a week Charles came in looking pale and haggard. His fine blue eyes were leaden, and his

clothing soiled and torn, and he looked as though he had wrestled with demons and suffered defeat.

It had been a week of terrible solicitude, especially to his father. The doctor, brushing daily with the outside world, and not given to troublesome thoughts, had rested in the conviction that some erratic wish which Charles did not like to reveal had sent him to the larger town; while Mercy could only think and wonder at his disappearance, finding each day some new reason less plausible than the first. Susan evidently had not thought seriously of the matter or she could not have left them so. But when he came home so haggard and changed they all felt that they had been too easy; and when he told them he had lain in the woods sick they were filled with sorrow that the suggestion of Loudon Sanford to hunt for the boy had not been carried out.

The doctor helped him as he could, with stimulating remedies, but it was many days before he was sufficiently himself to walk to the farm and fill the place of a full hand. A neighbor who owed the doctor had cut the wheat, and was busy in the little oat-field.

Mercy pondered much over this sickness of her brother, which seemed unlike other sicknesses, and a little shadow of fear entered her heart. And when one day he asked where that miserable priest had carried Susan, she thought something connected with her friend lay at the bottom of it all. He looked more like the Charles of old when she told him that Susan had returned to Dr. Sales' to pursue her former vocation of teacher than he had done since the fearful

absence. But the joy in his face did not last. Doubtless he thought she was earning money to furnish a home of her own.

It was long before the entertaining stories which Charles could tell inimitably echoed again through the house. There seemed to be a spell upon his life which the spirit of home could not exorcise.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BEGINNING THE MEETING-HOUSE.

THE following winter had been fully set apart by Dr. Sanford to make a beginning toward the erection of the new meeting-house. The few neighbors who sympathized with the project had promised to do what they could in the way of getting logs into the saw-mill, and some of the citizens who were in debt to the doctor for professional services, and had neither money nor produce to spare with which to pay him, thought they could chop down some of the century-old trees so hard to get rid of in clearing the land, and thus serve themselves, pay a debt, and have a hand in building unto the Lord a house.

This initial work was fairly under way. The ringing of axes in the frosty air all along the river margin as the doctor rode leisurely homeward was to him an inspiring sound. He heard in these fainter tones the chimes of city churches, and in imagination saw a multitude of people going up to worship in the house which he should build. The narrow town had stretched itself like an awakening giant, and he seemed to see many spires pointing toward heaven, and many homes rising out of the dim air. Far up the sides of the Alleghanies were cultivated gardens in the shadow of

frugal habitations. Commerce filled the river with its craft, and the town with contributions from other and older lands. The people ran to and fro on errands of interest, and all the picture glowed with ambitious and successful life. It was a pleasant picture to the doctor notwithstanding his love of solitude ; and as it flashed before him without any evoking he cherished it tenderly, and so it often reappeared.

When many hands were busy in this good work, and somebody was needed to make the reckonings of boards and timber, Dr. Sanford asked his brother to take the post and oversee the work. But he had touched a tender chord. Charles believed that this house was being built for Elder Marks, and he thought the doctor very foolish to make such heavy outlays for him, and was quite determined to have nothing to do with it, and said so very emphatically.

"But why not, Charles? You have nothing else of importance. They have given the school to Drury — so I heard to-day."

"Then I shall go somewhere else. I shall work where I can be paid for it. I can have the school in Bolton, but have not answered them because, of course, I preferred to be at home."

"I certainly purpose paying you for this, Charlie, and if you will do the work, — that is, the mathematical part of it, and oversee the men, I will give you as much as you can get in teaching school."

"I suppose when the house is built that priest will settle in Vinetown."

"I don't know that he will. It is more probable that he will be a missionary. He likes the work, and the whole State needs him as much as we do."

"How will Susan like that?"

"Susan! What do you mean? Well, I believe I begin to see, — just a little. Why, my boy, I thought Susan belonged to you as much as my wife is mine; except indeed the marriage-rite, and supposed that would take place long ago, and have wondered why it did not."

"She has been colder than ice to me, and that don't look much as though she was mine."

"Have you ever asked her to be yours? You did not expect a sensible girl like Susan to offer herself, did you?"

"No. But she did not even seem glad to see me, and I have seen her seem glad to see somebody else."

"Nonsense. Susan is not a member of the soft class of women. She will not tell a man she loves him unless he makes the proper advances; and I have no doubt she would take especial pains to keep her feelings to herself if they were interested. It was perfectly natural for her to seem glad to see Elder Marks. He had been half a year or more in our house, and we all like him. He and Susan are friends, and she feels perfectly free in his presence. There is no lover's bashfulness about it."

"Are you sure of what you say, Wesley?"

"That is the way the matter looks to me. To be sure, I have not the power of looking into their thoughts. But I don't believe their interest in each other is anything more than friendship and sympathy of faith."

"What did she go away for so suddenly, and when I was absent and sick?"

"Doubtless because my brother came home from his years' absence in a foreign country so polished a gentleman that she felt his presence dangerous to her peace."

"Don't make fun, Wesley. This is a serious matter to me."

"I'm glad it is. I should be proud of Susan as a sister; and if you are interested in her take a sensible way of showing it. Above all things, don't imagine she knows the exact temper of your heart unless you have revealed it to her. Why, she is not even acquainted with Charles Sanford, the man. You forget that eight or ten years have gone by since she saw you, until you flashed upon us all with your glory. I confess you seem too fine for my brother, and if I feel the need of getting acquainted with you, pray don't expect an old neighbor to fall into your arms unless you open them and invite her to come."

"But I have written letters to her, — quite a number —"

"And told her you loved her?"

"That was plain in the fact. I would not write letters to a girl I cared nothing about."

"She don't know that unless you have told her. I have heard of men who always took it for granted that they were understood whether they took any pains to reveal themselves or not, but I thought my brother belonged to a less dreamy class. Why; old fellow, if you marry Susan, she won't be satisfied unless you keep on telling her you love her. That is something you can't say once for all as you can your marriage-vow."

"I think a wife ought to be assured of her husband's love when he takes care of her."

"The testimony of good works is a fine thing, but it is not convincing. All the little things you do to make home pleasant have a voice, but these you share as well as the wife. You cannot do enough of these to abolish the necessity of the confessional. Woman craves the adoration with which she was won. But you don't seem to reckon anything as your part of the bargain. You came home and expected Susan Rice to be overjoyed to see a man she did not know, just because you had written a few letters to her which she might have understood, — and doubtless she did understand all you said."

"I have never had any other purpose than to marry Susan when I should be old enough to settle in life."

"And have never told her?"

"Not directly."

"How did you know she would wait for you or have you at all? No knowing but she has a lover in C——, who has a tongue of his own, and has made sure of her long ago."

"She would not answer my letters if she had."

"She might write any number of friendly letters without compromising her position as the promised wife of another. If you write to her confessing your attachment, the kind of answer you get to that will determine your future. I would not live in this uncertain way, unless, indeed, somebody intercepted my letters, as Isadore used to. But we have strayed from the subject. Will you help about the house? You can thus be at home during the winter, which we greatly desire."

"Will you allow me a few days to consider the proposition?"

"As long as you wish, provided you will work while you are considering. The men need a little help in reckoning the number of feet to certain sized logs. It will not take you long."

"I will do that much, certainly."

"Even though the church be erected for Elder Marks?"

"Please don't taunt me."

"Pardon me, brother. But it was so silly of you I could not help it. This priest has buried his heart, and now he is wedded to the unseen and spiritual. I do not believe the woman lives whom he would think of as a wife."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LOVE'S SUPREMACY.

THE select school in C—— was more flourishing than ever before. Susan entered into the old routine with something of the old relish, to be sure, but not all. Sometimes the dull lessons which she had to explain over and over again grew very tedious, and she half wished for a sight of Mercy Sanford and the Alleghanies instead of those monotonous benches with their rows of lay-figure faces.

But no matter how the day had dragged at the school-house there was always light and joy in the home of her foster-father. Here she forgot her vexations. Here she knew that the eyes of love looked kindly upon her. The old doctor, who was trying to shake off the cares of his practice, and have a breathing spell at the top of the hill he had climbed, was always ready with a cheerful word when Susan looked dull or weary, and so she returned each morning to her toil refreshed in spirit, and the monotonous days went on, — not like a growing tree — she was not happier with each returning sun, though it is hoped the children grew in wisdom, and stature too, — but life was to her more like the revolution of a sphere. There was one steady motion in one orbit.

Every position in life is nearly so. But the young, looking into the future where they shall act a part, are too apt to see all the colors of the rainbow in their chosen place. Happy for them if, by a joyous spirit alive to love, they keep the colors of the prism, and do not find themselves moping in an atmosphere entirely blue.

Dr. Sales had heard the name of the singular patient whom he helped Sanford in setting right often coupled with Susan's reminiscences of Vinetown. He had, too, a desire to see the man in a sound condition and hear his defence before the power which reigned as king in that region. So he wrote to him at one of his mission-stations, inviting him to add another post to his circuit, and waited in patience, trusting himself to find out whether Susan was less jovial than of old because this man was born handsome.

Somehow the Elder was a long time in responding. Too far off, no doubt, to come in person on short notice, though Dr. Sales wanted him there before cold weather. Every time the door opened to admit a stranger he looked quickly to see if the guest he secretly expected was about to be ushered in. And one night, while they sat about the evening lamp, he with his book, the good wife nodding over her knitting-work, and Susan with her needle, the door opened, and a gentlemen was ushered in who was not the priest, — but Winters, the grocer. He did not come to the doctor's so unless for professional advice; so when the question, "Is anybody sick at your father's, neighbor?" was answered negatively, Dr. Sales settled back in his easy chair, anticipating a pleasant chat

with a man who was "no fool of a fellow," as he sometimes said when he meant to bestow especial praise.

But he was very bitterly disappointed. Nothing of the kind was in store for him at this time.

After a few minutes of commonplace talk, Susan folded up her work and lighted an extra lamp, and Dr. Sales opened his eyes wide to see the two walking toward the parlor-door as though they perfectly understood each other.

"Well, wife, that must be an intimation of coming events. When a widower goes courting, it don't take him so long as it did me. I'll warrant Winters will propose before he tells Sue he loves her, or finds out whether she cares a straw for him. It is a wonder he has not been here to ask you if you 'knew of anybody that would make him a good wife.' But perhaps he has had his eye on Susy all the time. Now I think of it, he has behaved remarkably well for a widower. I don't believe he has asked a single girl to marry him. And it's a wonder he has not proposed to a half-dozen by this time."

"Why, father, you are hard on widowers."

"I can't help it. If they would court the second wife as they did the first, and not ask all the old ladies in the neighborhood for advice, I should have no occasion for what I say. I count it a good thing for me that you took it in your head to stay with me. It seems to be fore-ordained that widowers shall make themselves ridiculous, and I'm very much obliged to you, wifey, for saving me that shame"

Dr. Sales was a little excited. He was taken by surprise. Looking in another direction he had not

seen all the little advances Winters had really made. Often Susan brought from her school-house rich autumn flowers. He supposed the scholars brought them. And so they did, but Winters sent them. And then he had brought books from the office for Susan. Winters sent them, too, but the doctor did not know that; neither did Susan. Babbling children told about the flowers. The postmaster had not seen fit to send word who dropped the books.

The doctor pretended to read after this. And just as Mrs. Sales laid the Bible before him at the hour for evening devotions the hall-door opened and shut, and Susan came in with unmoved face and sat down quietly, as was her custom.

The doctor was quieted, and did not rally her about the visitor. He thought if she wanted to tell them she would do so voluntarily. But she went directly to her own room, and did not seem inclined to talk after prayers.

The sweet sleep of the clear conscience and strong nerve came to Susan Rice, and when she awoke on the morrow she could see clearly that it was her duty, in the absence of father and mother, to counsel with those who had come nearer to this character than anybody else in the world. After breakfast she said simply that Mr. Winters wanted to marry her, and she would like advice.

"Do you love Mr. Winters, Susan?"

"I hardly know him yet. He seems to be a very pleasant man."

"Do you propose marrying him before you know him?"

"He has done that, doctor, and confidence begets its like."

"I have no doubt Winters is a good man. If you want me to praise him I can do that. He is careful and persevering in business, and pays his doctor's bills. He has the prettiest house in the village, and the biggest garden, with the most flowers in it in the season for them. I think he hoes and waters them himself, — that is, when the rain don't get the start of him. I should like to see the green blinds open again, and have no objection to seeing my Sue looking out of the windows, provided she loves the proprietor of the house, — on no other condition."

"He offers me a home, doctor, and the shelter of his love and name, and suppose I am past loving man, — that is, with the enthusiasm of first love, — would it be wrong for me to marry him? He has loved and lost, too, — or, I mean, —"

"Well, well, I did not know before that my little girl had loved and lost. Come, tell us all about it. Is your sweetheart really dead, Susy?"

"Excuse my unfortunate expression, doctor. I meant Mr. Winters had loved and lost."

"But I thought you were trying to adjust the scales, and put in as much catnip on one side as there was on the other. What did you say about being 'past loving?' How old are you, Miss Rice? Why, I am not past that myself, and I am gray with age and honors."

Susan covered her face in confusion. She wanted counsel, and she couldn't quite tell everything necessary in the case. The doctor saw her embarrassment,

and fearing that she really had some serious trouble he dropped his playful mood.

"I will say this, Susy, as though you were my own child. If you love any man who is really alive, and lack of confidence or misunderstanding has divided you, wait before you give your decision. I should think a woman of your temper would wait forever under such circumstances. I know the shelter of a home and an honorable name are not to be despised by anybody who feels the loneliness of orphanage. But you have a home here, and so long as I live you shall have it, and how much longer it becomes me not to say in this presence. Don't go into a house thinking to make it home unless you can take your heart with you."

Susan went to the old doctor and thanked him for his good word, and sealed her gratitude with a kiss. If she had told him it was the first she ever gave to one of his sex, doubtless he would have judged her as not being very far in the mysteries of love, either living or lost.

Before the day waned another actor came upon the scene, and it seemed as though the season of surprises had really come to Susan.

When Doctor Sales watched the new light in the eyes of the girl as she listened to Elder Marks for a whole evening he thought he read her secret, but couldn't see where the "lost" came in. There was the priest in perfect health, and not past middle life, just in the season of ripeness to man, who is a long time in maturing, and he seemed quite as glad to see the girl as she was to see him, and as "true as the

world," she took him aside as if for a private interview as soon as the evening prayers were said!

It was a hard place for the Elder when Susan counselled with him. Not that she distrusted Dr. Sales' advice, or, indeed, her own private judgment, but partly to have something to lean upon outside of herself. Really, she felt that such a man as Winters, the grocer, ought not to be trifled with; and she wanted to brace herself, by the help of another, who seemed very near and dear, for the word which conscience dictated her to speak.

Elder Marks did not readily answer. He seemed to be thinking. His head was bowed a little, and one hand shaded his eyes to protect them from the lamp, no doubt. He recalled a time when out on the mountain with his gun he had come suddenly into the presence of a maiden, so lost in reading she did not hear the rustle of the leaves as he brushed them, nor the snapping of twigs under his footfalls. He did not mean to be privy to her meditations, but words fell on his ear as she folded the absorbing letter which made him think she was not quite free. These words had been in his heart many times since then. Indeed, they had helped him forget himself more entirely than would have been possible without them. He had buckled more closely the armor of effort. He had toiled with a single eye. He had given himself to the world with an entirety impossible to the man who has individual ties. To be sure, he was not positive of the source of the letter, but he had his opinion, and many little circumstances had confirmed it. The quiet dignity of this young woman

was very winning to a sensible man. And this man had come back from the grave's door with a soul purified of all morbid views of life and all indifference to his race. He saw the world in new colors. The very air was elixir, and the grass under his feet blossoms. Each gift of nature which appealed to soul or sense he enjoyed like an unpurverted child. Never before had existence been such a thrilling boon. With every breath he mingled praise for a restored life, in the perfect gladness and satisfaction which filled his whole being.

And what a change had come over the face of his brother man! No longer miserable sinners, suffering the curse of offended justice, flitted before him like shadows of an awful doom, but in every human face he saw a child of "our Father in heaven," wandering afar from Him it may be, but not beyond the reach of his infinite love and care. New beauty looked out from human eyes. New glories opened in the future, and each human being was revealed to his acute and happy sense in the perfection possible to one created in the image of God.

For six months this orphan had flitted before him daily in all her native beauty of soul, and with that beauty intensified by the new life he was living. He thought in his heart that he loved his race with a universal affection which was quite impartial. And yet this conference to which she had summoned him flashed an instant heart-view like a passing glance in a mirror. But he shut it away, or tried to, with a resolute will, and taking his hand from his eyes, counselled the orphan very much as Dr. Sales had done.

Susan might have seen deeper than the surface of the fine face which was turned full upon her if she had cared to see. There was an instant look of intense feeling almost overmastering the will; and by the tremor which came to her heart I know she was not blind. But it passed, as he, calmer than marble, sat erect, and told her to follow the dictates of her heart in this matter, and marry Winters if she loved him.

Susan wanted to say she did not love him, but after the look she had seen on the face of the minister she was afraid. She had come to him with a little child's confidence, but she feared she had touched a wound. And so the conference ended. But as Elder Marks tossed upon his pillow without finding an oblivious moment he questioned his heart as to the righteousness of his course.

Suppose this girl's attachment lay in the direction which he surmised. Was it right to let her walk blindly when a word from him might open her eyes? Would she continue her single-hearted idolatry, had she been in Bolton when he was, and looked upon an unconscious face? No doubt she had invested this man with all nobility because of his brilliant powers. Would it take anything from her hero-worship to look upon a face which she could not relume by her passionate gaze, and address tender words to one whose response would be gibberish because he was not master of himself?

For a moment it seemed to the minister that duty bade him speak. Then he looked into his own heart, and tried to sift from it all selfishness. Would any such motive be attributable to him should he reveal

the sad vision which he had seen? Not unless he followed it by opening the door of his own heart. And could he keep that door shut forever if this woman should dethrone her idol because its feet were of clay?

Alas! Alas! Well — her love might redeem him. So the minister thinks at last. Her love may be the very strength he needs for this, his only weakness. If there is hope of this it is better that he keep silent. But perhaps she already knows it. There is some trouble between them, or she would not consider for a moment this offer of Mr. Winters. They may be divided now; and if so, will it be wrong for him to plead? Hark!

“Winters has a home, I am a wanderer. Winters has all the appliances of plenty; I could shelter her with my love, but she might lack many things. And if the first love is shattered she had better marry — *him*. But may be she loves — no, that is impossible!”

He remembers what he heard on the mountain, and then the suffering, the halt, and the maimed take on new glories, as he reaches out his arms to lead them to the fount of healing while he walks erect, leaning alone on the arm of the Almighty.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SURPRISES.

HOW long a vacation are you going to take, Susy? I suppose you'll want a little rest before you begin another term. Four months steady is rather a long pull."

"I have concluded not to teach any longer, doctor. The mists have cleared away, and I see my duty in another path. But I thank you for your good counsel none the less, my dear friends."

"Going to hurry up the wedding while the Elder is here, sis? Or, I declare, I don't know but it is him you are going to marry."

This plain speech was a little too hard upon both Susan and the minister, sitting as they were at the dinner-table, and their changed color, which in one was crimson and the other pallor, quite confirmed the doctor in his suspicion. Unfortunately neither of them spoke for a minute, and then Susan, realizing the embarrassment which such a speech must be to her friend, said, as gaily as she could,

"O no, doctor. Of course Elder Marks don't care to be party to a wedding—that is, bridegroom—though I want him to marry me and he must. But I have been reading a long letter from an old friend and think I shall have to give up the school."

"Ho, ho! Mystery! mystery! I really don't know what our Susan is coming to. But time will determine. I will possess my old soul in patience—that is if I can!"

"Yes, doctor, time will determine. And when I tell you that my heart is as light as though a mountain had fallen from it you will think time is about to determine everything beautifully for me and fulfil my most cherished wish."

When the minister saw the joy on his friend's face, he was glad he had mused on the previous evening until he reached the mount of self-sacrifice, and there had folded the wings of his desire.

After a few weeks of work and bustle and preparation the home of Dr. Sales missed an inmate—its light and joy—the home of Dr. Sanford was divided, and the house on the river-farm had light in its windows after the sun went down.

But a new soul came to the new house on the Alleghany not long after this, and it still numbered three, as when it was first consecrated; though the patriarch, Loudon Sanford, now a happy grandfather, had gone up to the river-farm to make his home with Charles and Susan.

The timbers for the meeting-house were all cut and ready for erection. Long and high piles of boards gleamed in the summer sun. The winter just fled had been one of success and fulfilment to the Sanfords. The doctor had tried here and there to obtain a desirable site on which to erect the building which meant so much to him. But the men of Vinetown had very

little land, — and none to spare. And, then, some of them were afraid of the contiguity of such a house. At last he had given up seeking a better spot, and set apart his own garden for the purpose. It was large, and would be a good site. Not quite equal to a location farther back from the river, on the sloping hills, but convenient, and as it was the only spot obtainable, it grew in fitness until the doctor thought it the very best.

He had marshalled his friends far and near to draw the timber. The day was set apart for this and the “raising” too. Susan came down to help Mercy cook for the workmen. It is customary to this day in “Palatine” to get dinner for a “raising.” And the heavy timbers with which that people build give the men such hard lifting that the dinner is a welcome part of the ceremonies.

On the evening of the day some of the men of Vine-town who were a little averse to this project of Dr. Sanford’s, and did not want to see his faith represented in the village by a house of worship, called upon him and proposed to buy the timber as it lay at the mill, and convert it into a Methodist meeting-house on a site of their selecting. Dr. Sanford spurned their proposition. His cherished purpose had not so nearly reached fulfilment to be thus rudely disappointed. He told these men he might not be able to finish the building this year, but he should go on with it as fast as he could. They departed, and the doctor turned to look over some letters and papers which he had laid aside on the approach of his visitor.

One of the letters was from Dr. Sales and its reve-

lations were astonishing, as well as painful. It was the first intimation he had received of the change of fortune which had come to the house of Horace Ryder. Matters had grown much worse since we took our last peep in that direction. Horace—broken in spirit, perhaps—no longer drove about in his one-horse wagon, that remnant of his wrecked fortune, carrying bundles for the “one-price store,” or boxes and packages for the “corner-grocery.” He was at home, coddled up in a corner of his small house and called himself sick. Eunice blustered about doing what she could for him, and between each application of mint-tea or mustard poultice, she was sure to put in a stinging rebuke for his folly in mortgaging the farm. “He was doing well enough before; and the farm might have been saved!” Now they were in the deeps of poverty, and certain leading members of the church proposed making “Brother Ryder” a donation-party in consideration of his long and faithful services as class-leader. They were marshalling their forces for this great demonstration when the report became current in the neighborhood that Ryder was too sick to receive such a host of company. The matter had been talked over, and had come to the ears of the family. They knew what donation-parties were. They had attended one or two given in honor of the circuit-minister. They knew that each individual accompanied his gift, and, though the gifts might be very acceptable indeed, the sight of so many faces of old friends in their altered circumstances was more than Horace felt equal to. So he grew sicker day by day as the time approached, and when the set time had really arrived,

it was currently reported that "Brother Ryder" was too ill to receive his friends. As the teams came in one after another from all the region round about, the house of Dennis Canfield was open to receive their contributions, and Miranda had a season of delight quite unequalled since the day when Dennis so suddenly and unexpectedly asked her to marry him. She handled the little packages very carefully and without visible symptoms of curiosity in presence of the donors. She flew about among them, trying to make them comfortable, by relieving them as soon as possible of their burdens, and without the least idea of intimating to them the possibility of staying there to enjoy the customary supper.

There was a great disappointment on the part of the company that they could not deliver their several gifts in person to Horace Ryder, and had there been immediate prospect of the restoration of that gentleman they would almost have waited, that they might have all the accessories of a real donation, spread out all the cooked food and eat it, according to the prevalent custom at such parties! As it was, they could only pin on little labels announcing the name of the several givers, and, in the absence of an invitation from Mrs. Canfield, depart to their own homes.

After they were gone Miranda peered into some of the bundles to ascertain the quality and value of their contents, but she was scrupulously careful not to tear any of the *names*!

Dr. Sales, called to the neighborhood as counsel in the case of a man, who, in felling timber, had unfortunately smashed his leg, heard about the sickness of

his old acquaintance, and the donation party, which was, and was not, on the previous evening. As a friend he called upon the Ryders. If, in the journey of life they had fallen sick by the wayside, he was the man to forget whether they were Jews or Samaritans. So he went right in cheerfully, as though to lose one's money was not a matter of much moment, and did not even put on a long face when Horace told him he was very sick and his time was at hand. As soon as he had examined the case he knew better.

"You are a little blue, Ryder. You stay in the house too closely, don't you?"

"I've never been the same man since I lost my farm. It broke me all down, doctor."

"You shouldn't worry about that. What's done can't be helped. You had better look ahead than look back. Nobody gains anything by brooding over the past only as a talisman or guide in the future. To look over our misfortunes for the sake of learning how to avoid their repetition is all very well. But it don't pay to sit idly down and think of failures. There's no use in your dying. You are good for at least twenty years yet, if you'll just brighten up and look ahead. Let the old farm go, and set about earning another one."

"I have no heart to do anything and no strength either."

"You won't have any strength long if you give up so. Come, brighten up. Perhaps your children will give you a lift, so that you can at least have a home in your old age."

"Ah, Isadore is poor, too. The dear child would

be willing to help her old father if she could, but she can't.

"Well, well. There'll be some way. I suppose the brethren brought you a few hundred last night?"

"Not any money, but many little needful articles. Miranda has just piled them away in the closet. I do wish they had brought some money! We can have this house and garden for three hundred dollars, and I'm afraid somebody else will buy it, and then we shall be turned out doors!"

"Three hundred dollars? Well, I think the church might do as much as that for one of its faithful. Do they know about it?"

"Yes. We thought may be that was what they were going to do; but they didn't. And I'm sicker than ever to-day."

"I suppose they brought you provisions enough to last at least a year, if they brought no money?"

"Miranda! Miranda! Open the door, and let the doctor see our donation. I trust we are not ungrateful for it. But oh,—I do wish I had three hundred dollars! 'Twould be an awful thing to be turned out of doors, and may be have to go to the poorhouse."

Horace Ryder spoke like a man whose pride was nearly gone, but the doctor was one to confide in. His very presence disarmed all suspicion in those who were troubled or in any way cast down. His great heart overflowed with sympathy and good feeling, whenever distress appealed to him in any of its various aspects, and, though for mere curiosity's sake, he cared nothing at all about the items of Ryder's donation, yet as a man who sympathized, and was

determined to help, he listened to Miranda's enumeration, and told Dr. Sanford in his letter he was quite positive he recalled every item which the rich old farmers, far and near, members of the same church, had felt moved to give to an unfortunate brother. The doctor read the inventory with astonishment, believing, as he did, in the religion of work as well as profession. He read it aloud unconsciously. Mercy listened. We will listen.

"There were little packages of tea and coffee, and sugar, and rice; little bags of meal and flour, and potatoes; little rolls of calico enough for an apron or two; little strips of cotton-cloth, all told, enough to make Horace a pair of shirts; little pats of butter; a copy of Pilgrim's Progress from the circuit minister; two spare-ribs, a boiled ham, six apple pies, two loaves of sweet-cake, one of them with a full half-pound of chopped raisins in it; a half peck of doughnuts, a pan of biscuits, and a little stack of tarts. And Joanna Bunker had given a silver half-dollar for a bit of muslin to adorn Mrs. Ryder's neck! so the label on the delicate package informed me. Why didn't she give the money? And the others who brought packages of dry-goods, why did not they bring the money? The Ryders have not been in this case long enough to lack greatly in clothes — or perhaps they exchanged produce for the articles. At least we think Joanna might have given them the pleasure of spending that half-dollar of hers!"

"What is it, Wesley?"

"A letter from Dr. Sales."

"But you were reading something about our folks. Let me see the letter?"

Dr. Sanford dropped the letter upon the table, and went quickly out. He was one of those men to whom the path of duty opens clearly and readily. He never hesitated long as to the course to be pursued in any emergency. He knew how to look outside of himself; it was not unnatural to him, and long habit had made it not only easy but pleasant.

He went down the village street to the house of Amos Pennington. A half-dozen men were talking in the summer dusk.

"It will be an everlasting disgrace to the town to have a Universalist meeting-house in it," the doctor heard them say, and it stung him to the quick. He turned upon his heel as though to retrace his steps. This purpose of building the Lord's house was very dear and precious. But—he had decided—and he would do it yet, if he lived.

"Gentlemen, can you give me the ready money for the timber?"

"Ho, doctor, we didn't know you were so near. Followed us right along, didn't ye? Wal, no. We hadn't calculated to pay all down for it. But we'll do what we can, providing you'll really sell."

"Pay me cash in hand, and you shall have the frame and boards at your own offer."

"Why, doctor! What's changed ye so? I thought you said not half an hour ago you wouldn't sell on no condition whatever."

"A half hour ago, I thought there was not money enough in Vinetown to buy the timber, but since then a special plea has touched my heart. And if you make instant decision, my men may draw and raise it for

you to-morrow, as they were going to do for me, and as we have the dinner all ready for the table they shall dine at my house."

Dr. Sanford turned away. The men held consultation. They were rejoiced at the success of their late-formed plan, but the raising of so much money was something of a stumbling-block. Money was not so easily obtained as lumber and grain in that region. The builder thought he did well if he got money enough to buy his nails and door-latches. They knew they could erect a meeting-house on more economical terms than to purchase the material in that way. But Vinetown would be saved from "disgrace," and have a true Christian sheepfold, if they did this thing, and they determined to do it. Pennington owned a good deal of real estate in the country round about and had a rich friend in Erie. If they could not raise the money among them they were sure of getting it on application to him.

They returned to Dr. Sanford's and told him if he would wait three days the cash should be counted out to him. The doctor thought he *could* wait three days, but it seemed a long time to his impatient desire.

On the morrow the teams came and drew the timber, but not to the garden of the doctor. An elevated site, the very finest in town, had been set apart by Mr. Pennington. The men did not know until the frame stood clear against the background of mountain-hemlocks that Dr. Sanford's faith was not represented by this beginning of a house. Then he took them aside from the helpful villagers and told them how it was, and that necessity had postponed his purpose.

Mercy was glad of the better site, and that their garden would be preserved intact, until the doctor said he had sold the whole to the Methodists. And then, I think she did not cease to be glad, for she half divined the noble object of her husband.

CHAPTER XXX.

OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD.

DR. SALES visited the owner of the three-hundred-dollar house in which Horace Ryder lived, and found him quite willing to sell to a stranger, and not at all scrupulous about turning its occupant out of doors. He evidently wanted the price of the house in money, and accepted the very first offer which promised cash in hand.

When in the deed the name of the class-leader was written, it called out an ejaculation which savored more of joy than indifference, that one like "Brother Ryder," who had always had plenty, should be no longer obliged to live in a hired house.

"But who on airth has done such a thing? I always understood the old man hadn't no boys; or may be it's you; but now I think on't, you could spend your money to better advantage. Give it to the missionaries. They're always wantin' money."

"I am not at liberty to tell the name of the giver. But it is not I. A younger boy, and one who has his way to make in the world, and a growing family to take care of, sent the money to me with which to make this purchase."

"Well, he must 'a' been a pretty rich feller to do such a handsome thing. Most folks like to hang on to

their money, specially while they're young. Though I don't know as that makes much difference neither. Everybody likes to hang on to money far as I've observed."

"I tell you he is not rich, except in health and hope, but made a great sacrifice of personal desire to raise it because he is one who believes in the doctrine of overcoming evil with good."

"Astonishin' case, sartin! I spose there be such folks, but I never seen none of 'em. I think ye ought to print the feller's name!"

"For good and sufficient reasons the name is kept a secret, but the house will be quite as comfortable and secure to Mr. Ryder as though all the world knew his benefactor."

The deed was carefully inscribed to Horace Ryder and deposited in the post-office, and then Dr. Sales drove back to C——. feeling that the great humanity of which he was a member had received a sensible lift toward higher possibilities by this forgiving and self-sacrificing act of his friend Sanford.

Horace gave thanks in words as he sat down to the daily board whereon were remnants of the little packages which came in the donation. But his heart forgot to be very thankful. He thought of nothing now but the imminent probability of being turned out of doors. No doubt they could find some other place, but he wanted that one, and brooded and repined because he had no way of getting it. Then, to make his heart heavier, came a rumor that the house was sold over his head. Canfield had certainly heard that it

was sold, and John Smith, too, came in at evening with word that Lawyer Haskell had made out the deed that very day.

"We shall have to go to the poorhouse, John. I'm sick and can't work, and there's no other way!"

"Oh, no, father. If the house is sold come over and live with me. I'm not sure but you'd better come any way. Then you would save rent and we could all enjoy the donations together. You know that spare-rib came pretty near spoiling as it was."

"You can't hardly live yourself, John. Little Horace shan't be impoverished because his old grandfather was fool enough to mortgage his farm. No, I'll go to the poorhouse before that child shall suffer."

"No danger. Business is looking up. I bought a horse yesterday, a wild one just caught. I got him for next to nothing because nobody can handle him. I'm going to break him, and then he'll bring a big price or be good to trade on. And just give me a horse to trade on, and I'll manage to live."

"Be careful; be careful, John. Them Indian horses are dangerous critters. And what would little Horace do if his father should get killed now poor grandfather has lost his farm!"

If the post-office had been visited as regularly and as often then as now the heart of this distressed man might have been eased a little. But the Ryder family was not famous for a long list of correspondents, and so the deed lay undisturbed until John went for his newspaper, a luxury he thought it prudent to retain, especially now that his business talents were sometimes brought into requisition by the head of the firm,

in the way of advice as to the purchase of country produce. He knew better how to give advice if he read carefully the city markets.

The great paper package, which was not a newspaper at all, placed in his hands by the postmaster, and on which there was nothing to pay, quite astonished Mr. Smith. His head was full of visions of gold-mines and windfalls as he hurried down the street to Father Ryder's.

"Here's something for ye. And it isn't a letter from down country either — postmarked right here at the Centre! What can it be? Don't be slow in opening it. We're — that is, I am — on tiptoe. And so is mother. See her!"

Eunice was taking her station for a peep over her husband's shoulder. He tried to break the red seal, but his fingers trembled visibly.

"Let me take it, Horace." And his wife reached for the package. But Horace held on, and after a while unfolded and spread the great sheet fairly before him. By this time, John, too, was looking over his shoulder. They spelled at the wonderful words in concert, but John grasped the meaning first. "It's a deed, father — a deed of this house and lot; all paid, cash in hand, it says — and it's yours!"

Horace read on until he had made sure that it was really all that John had said, and then he leaned back in his chair. He thought the donation party had culminated at last, and the brethren had done something handsome. After a while he said so aloud.

"I don't believe a word of that, father. The church never gave you this house. A set of folks that can

bring half-pound packages of tea won't be likely to turn round, all of a sudden, and bring houses! You may depend upon it the house came in some other way."

"I can't think what other way, John."

"More likely it was Tom Jones. He is growing rich faster than any other man I know of. He was in the store the other day, and I heard him say everything doubled on his hands, and all he touched turned to money."

Horace sighed. He was thinking it would be quite a new turn of the tables if Thomas Jones had bought him a house.

"It can't be Jones; you remember I pressed him to pay up the mortgage. He would not be likely to turn round and buy a house for me after I'd hurried him out of his own shelter."

"He's just the man that would do it. Why, he has printed in the crown of his hat, 'Overcome evil with good.' I saw it when he laid his hat on the counter, and that very thing more than his getting rich made me think he did it."

"Well, you'd better not mention it, if you do think so. I should hate to be helped by Jones. To-morrow is love-feast, and I'll try to creep out, and then I shall learn where the deed came from."

John Smith, though a good church-member, did not believe the love-feast had any power of revealing the origin of the deed. He thought a visit to Lawyer Haskell more likely to unravel the mystery, and so called upon the attorney on his way home.

"You made out the deed of the house where Father Ryder lives, 'squire?"

"Yes."

"Well, as a family, we should like to know the purchaser. We desire to express our gratitude, you know. It's a great thing, a great thing, 'squire."

"Dr. Sales did the business, and paid the money, but he would not tell Cranch at whose instigation."

"Then you don't know where the money came from?"

"No farther than this, that Dr. Sales counted it out."

"Father thinks it came from the church. But I guess they'd be the last ones to employ Dr. Sales to do their business."

"They could not employ a better or more honest man."

"No, but it wouldn't be natural."

John thought it time to hurry home and tell Isadore the news, though he chafed a little at the mystery which he could not solve.

"Did father brighten up any?" she asked.

"Well, I should think he did. He said he should go to love-feast to-morrow, and that's what I call brightening up after sticking in the house so long as he has."

"I don't suppose a house will support father and mother; and I think you'd better begin to trade horses again. You were always lucky at that, and we shall have to take care of them in their old age. He won't brighten up enough to work much more."

"That's the very thing I propose doing, madam, just as soon as I tame Fox so that I can trade her, and I can manage all the money I shall make, too."

"But you'll have to help our folks. There's nobody else to do it."

"You don't seem to reckon the unseen and unknown who sent them the deed of the house."

"It is not likely they'll send anything more. How long will it take to break the horse?"

"That depends upon circumstances. Some of them Indian horses are always wild, no matter how hard you try to tame them. But I shall make my capital available as soon as possible, of course."

The "love-feast" which Horace Ryder really attended on the following day had called out more than the usual number of participants. Something, like a rumor in the air, made the people expectant. And when Horace got up and thanked the brethren for their very welcome donation of a house, and failed to mention anything about the apple-pies and boiled ham, there was quite a sensible flutter among them. Each looked at the other as much as to say, "I did not give the house, and I don't believe you did."

The circuit minister was glad their tried servant, the class leader, had been so munificently remembered, but he did not think the brethren gave the house; and if they didn't, it was right that Brother Ryder's mind be disabused of that impression.

Then one after another of the leading men got up and denied having any knowledge of the donation farther than the little packages were concerned, and some of them mentioned the kind and quantity of the little package which they really did donate—which seemed not altogether necessary after the labels, and Horace Ryder returned from the "love-feast," which

he had made extra efforts to attend, fearing he should be obliged to believe that Tom Jones really sent the deed of the house. But he was determined he would never acknowledge his secret thought aloud, nor allow any of his family to mention it.

Not many days after Jones came into the corner-grocery to do a little trading, and John Smith did not remember that his father-in-law had laid certain impressions of his under embargo, or if he did, his desire to fathom the mystery was so overwhelming that he could not resist the temptation to tell Jones about the deed, and see how he would take it. Jones evidently heard of the matter for the first time, and said so.

"Why, I didn't even know friend Horace had met with such a smash. You don't say he lost everything?"

"Everything, except his horse and wagon and some household goods."

"Well, I'm glad you have told me. We have an occasional extra chicken, and I should like to send it in to an old friend. I suppose you don't know, John, that I reckon your Father Ryder a blessing in disguise? If it had not been for him, and the furious way he pushed me, I never should have known anything about the 'milk and honey' of Palestine. That's the way the Lord overrules the evil intentions of his blind children. Some of us go through the world thinking only selfish thoughts, and grasping at everything we see, and our very abuse of our neighbors sometimes shoves them into better places, and the evil things we do recoil upon our own heads, and hurt nobody so much as ourselves."

"You think Father Ryder lost his farm because he pushed you to pay the mortgage, do you?"

"Oh, no, not that exactly, though I do believe that the very things we do to others sometimes befall us, and God's compensations are often measured out, not only in the same kind of measure which we have used, but the same kind of stuff in it, whether wheat or tares. Selfishness is a poor guest in anybody's heart, and never pays for the room it takes up. A man can go through the world a great deal happier if he takes pains to remember that he is not the only one there is, and can't absorb all the rain and sunshine if he tries."

Thomas Jones gathered up his groceries and left John Smith thinking. Let us hope he followed out the train started by this sensible man, even though it was as caustic to his old wounds.

The next day, towards evening, a man driving a fine red cow, might have been seen on the only street of the Centre, and after inquiring of a lad by the way something which we can't distinctly hear, he turns up a green lane at the left, and leaping from his horse, takes a bit of rope and ties the meek-eyed creature fast by a little wicker-gate. Nobody seems to see him, and he mounts again and rides away. Next morning, as Horace Ryder flavored his donation-coffee with rich cream he had an uneasy feeling about his heart. Horace is not blind.

John Smith was absent from the store a good deal after this, trying to break his Indian pony. He did not know that Jones called again very soon with bags of provisions, more than *all* the donation, and sent

them from thence to Horace Ryder. But Horace, after seeing the cow tied to his gate fully believed that the wheat and corn came from the same hand, and his head felt as though there were "coals of fire" on it. His need of all these helps, so apparent as he and Eunice sat down alone and bewailed their losses, was very suddenly doubled. He thought he had touched the depths before, but when the neighbors came, in breathless haste, and said that Isadore was a widow and little Horace fatherless, his heart sank within him as he saw at a glance what new burdens must fall upon him.

John left no property but the Indian pony, and nobody would want that after it had been the means of his death. The helpless wife and child would come back to their despondent father, there was no other way! These were the first thoughts which came to this man who had worshipped money, and plotted only for material success his life long.

He did not see the mangled form of his son-in-law, nor hear the extravagant lamentations of Isadore. He looked farther on, to an increased household without visible means of support, and his own repinings, which were terrible before, became like the ravings of a maniac.

"I thought to lean upon John in my old age! I have nobody else! We have cast Mercy off, and if Sanford does succeed in business we can't expect help from him. I have nothing left. My property gone! my only staff gone! And I've been a Christian all my life, too! There's Jones, he never prays, and he's getting rich. I don't know how it is, but I think

it's all wrong when such men as Jones come up to taunt me. What's the use! Oh, well, I shall go to heaven when I die; unless I fall from grace. But, the poor house! O God, deliver me from that disgrace! I see nothing else, with Isadore and little Horace to maintain."

This is the way he lamented his son John, and when the two came to live in his house, so mysteriously paid for, and from month to month they took from the office money enough to keep them comfortable, Horace Ryder still repined, though unseen fingers fed him.

Every help he received seemed to him like a two-edged sword. It did not come from the church, and it did come from somebody whom he had abused.

When he and Eunice read the letter which Wesley and Mercy wrote after hearing of John's death, they had a new suspicion that was worse than the thought of help from Thomas Jones. They had written, offering to do all in their power for the relief of the stricken ones, and the very fact that these misfortunes were known to them was a source of pain. And then to think it possible that the deed came from Wesley Sanford, the infidel, and the money on which they lived, too, was humiliating in the extreme.

But, I suppose, this threshing Horace Ryder needed. God knows best what kind of chastening to send. Happy for his children if they are so exercised by it as to break off their sins and their hardness of heart!

CHAPTER XXXI.

NOT ALL SUNSHINE.

DR. SANFORD had his hands full, not only of patients, but of plans. His dollars, which came in sparsely and not very fast, were needed in so many ways that he was sometimes puzzled to decide which call was most emphatic or should be first answered. But he always looked outside of himself first. There was the missionary, who must be kept in the field until a habitation could be erected for him in Vinetown. There was the impoverished house of Horace Ryder, to which regular remittances must be made. There was the meeting-house to build, and at present it seemed utterly impossible to begin even an axe-stroke in that most intense direction of his desire.

But while the good work so prospered in the hands of Elder Marks as he went through valleys and over mountains, through forests and bridgeless streams, gathering here and there his listeners of earnest, inquiring men and women, it seemed easier to wait the providential time for building the Lord's house. And Dr. Sanford knew that time would come. He hoped, as the field widened, and whitened too, other toilers would enter it. And so there was always before him, winning him onward, this beautiful vision of a

multitude of people, blessed by his patient waiting, and a completed house in many valleys besides Vine-town, which forever he hoped would be first to stretch out its loving arms to God.

And in the midst of such work and such hopes the years went noiselessly by, leaving their little days of date and reckoning in the advent of another pair of blue eyes to look at life like their father, or a repetition of the cherry cheeks of their mother, which grew less and less cherry as they were repeated over and over again in happy and beloved children.

His house was the centre of all sweet and tender graces, the natural outgrowth of a love which time cannot dim. The gifted and eminent among his own profession gathered about him in the circle of enduring friendship, and if a minister from the East travelled that way he was sure to be a guest at the board of Dr. Sanford.

If the rich found in him a ready helper, so also did the poor, and medicines were not dealt by his hand with more regularity than bread and garments. And always where there was doubt or trouble of soul he stood as a benignant and ready helper. Many an hour of mental anguish, so acute as to be almost insanity, he soothed by the timely unfolding of a Father's love and care, and made the way through the valley of death luminous where all was dark before. His mission among men he felt to be that of helper wherever there was a cry of distress which he had the power to relieve. And to fulfil this mission as well as mortal can he bent the best energies of his life.

I do not say he was a faultless man. No man is

faultless. But he was one whose ruling motive was pure, and whose inspiration to work was love of human kind.

I might stand by the door of his small house, and, looking in upon meek-faced Mercy, in the midst of her prattlers, say, "This man lives too much outwardly. He does not weigh these little domestic cares nor lighten them as he might." There are bread enough and garments enough in the house, to be sure; but there is weariness which another pair of hands might lighten. The room is small, too, and with such a practice as Dr. Sanford's we expect to see a better house.

But Mercy does not complain, and so we do not. She is glad to have the money it would cost to keep a girl sent regularly to her old father. And while she manages to do all her own work, she feels that in some sense she earns the money which fills this chasm, and so it is she who does it; and it makes Mercy happy to be conscious of the power of a helper; and so, as I said, all tender graces reign and the two are of one soul.

And though at times she may sigh for the comforts of a civilization which has advanced somewhat in Vinetown, and a house equal to her neighbors, she enters heartily into Wesley's plans, and never grudges the missionary his meagre stipend, and hopes the time will come soon when there will be a place where she can take the children to meeting, and a Sunday-school where they can be taught of God the Father. And while she thus hopes, she knows her husband must himself build this Sunday home.

Up the valley there have been seed-time and harvest,

and the world has revolved, and no more. Loudon is growing too decrepid to work much on the farm, but Charles has turned out a neat farmer, notwithstanding his preferences for another calling, and he manages to satisfy his desire for eminence by teaching regularly the winter school. No man has rarer gifts as a teacher, and all the community know and acknowledge it.

Susan is a thrifty wife, and, if not so tender and loving as some women, a careful and conscientious mother. She has welcomed the new souls as they came, one after another, and proved herself dexterous in the manufacture of wardrobes out of scraps which another would have thrown away. She cuts, and turns, and mends, until the wedding-dress has descended to the youngest born, and there is never a shred left of it big enough to hold a patch.

The money Charles earns in the school-room goes to pay for the place, which the old Otsego farm did not quite cover; it goes in trades, some of them lucky, and others not, and it goes in mysterious journeys, which it took many years to solve.

This man started in life with a good stock of personal pride, and that kept the eyes of his wife, Susan, blind for a long time. He was proud of his brilliant gifts, proud of his power over men, proud of being considered greatest, and too proud to have the world know his own consciousness of a mortal weakness. And when he came in one night, while the wife was undressing her youngest born, and looked unnatural, and said terrible things, and tried to throw the child into the blazing fire, there came a pain to the heart of Susan, ominous and sickening, and it

seemed as though she could never rally from the wound. A ghost forever stood by her side, and haunted her waking hours, and even obtruded his ghastly visage among her weary dreams. When her husband went away on any errand for the house she watched his coming with a dread which was heavy as nightmare; and after the first fall she saw the unnatural look very often, so often that she lived in constant fear when he was not about the farm. And as the children grew from babyhood they knew they lived in a house which was "horror-haunted," and would skulk and hide in a tremor of pain and apprehension when it was time for "papa" to come home from the mill or the store. Only when he went out to his work upon the farm, or down to the district school-house, did even his little children laugh and sing like other children. And sometimes he would go away after food, when the house was empty, and day after day go by in the midst of fasting as well as fear, until some neighbor drove the horses home, and helped the unconscious husband and father to a place of safety under his own roof. Then there would be creeping steps about the house as though the dead were in it.

There were times when six months would go by and the strange and terrible look never once appear upon the face of Charles Sanford. No man looked out better for the welfare of his house than he when he was himself. No man toiled harder or schemed more constantly to increase his gains. No father was more justly proud of his children, or looked out more carefully for their intellectual training. When for a long

time the spectre appeared not, hope would plume its wings and whisper half tremblingly that the evil days were passed. Then of a sudden the clouds gloomed again, hope died in wife and child, and tears and terror reigned.

Charles Sanford did not fathom these awful depths without suffering the stings of an avenging conscience. He came back to the light of reason deploring the lost money, the lost name, the lost peace. For days there were lamentation and wailing in the house, more and more prolonged, until pity alone softened the heart of each inmate, and there was found no place for blame for what seemed to be a malady rather than the voluntary commission of a sin.

His old father sighed deeper than ever before, and though his loneliness increased as the snows of life's winter thickened, he was glad the heart of his beloved Rachel slept undisturbed in her grave under the willow.

Though the soil yielded its increase, and health abode in this home, and Susan was a careful and thrifty wife, there were no gains to be counted as the years slipped by. Too often plans had been laid without the guide of reason, and bargains consummated when the loss, which was their inseparable condition, could not be accurately reckoned. And while Wesley found something to give, though he himself lived prudently, Charles was obliged to live prudently and have nothing to give or save.

While in the one house abode that perfect love which casteth out fear, in the other was love still, — clinging and trusting and hoping against hope.

Clinging closer as the foundations of its trust weakened with the years, until the love of wife and child was like that we bear the babe, helpless in the arms of its mother. It was watchful and anxious continually.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE SAME MEASURE RETURNED.

ISADORE SMITH, after several years, laid aside her widow's weeds. The reason for this step lay mainly in the fact that she had seen a rich man from "down country" who desired her to correspond with him. She had known this man when he was younger, and had a very tender side toward him once. But he did not belong to the set over the river, and besides he had not the remotest prospect then of being rich. John did belong to the set, and had the beginnings of a fortune; so John prevailed. It seemed to this widow an especial interposition of providence that Samuel Torrence should seek her again in the midst of her distress and poverty. He came laden with the honors of a life well lived so far, and upon every line of his face was written the word "success." He had ripened with the years, and was withal beautiful to look upon. As he and Isadore went about from place to place, "looking land,"—for this man had some thought of making his future home in the West,—she felt herself drawn to him with the same old tenderness, only intensified by time.

And when he returned to Otsego, where he thought at least a year must elapse before their marriage, she

acknowledged herself more deeply in love than ever in her life. In fact, she began to question in her heart whether she had ever loved at all before. It was well for the memory of John Smith that a "monumental slab" already marked his resting-place, to tell to future generations that such a man had lived, and that "he died from a blow received while breaking his Indian pony, whose name was Fox," or he might utterly have slipped from the memory of man, if all who knew him had dethroned him as entirely as Isadore did when good Samuel came. But happily John had slept long and well; and many a worse man than he has gone to fill a grave. He would not be disturbed by this love-scene in the drama of Isadore's life, nor care greatly if he knew himself forgotten. I think the rest he found was sweet and welcome to him, relieved as it was from any possibility of the intrusion of a scolding, rasping tongue.

For days and weeks Isadore lived in a delicious dream. She had the memory of all the sweet and precious things her lover had said to cheer her after his departure, and then, too, the hope of hearing from him regularly and often. She ran down street to the post-office more frequently than ever before. She watched and waited and dreamed and hoped. No young maiden in the first dawn of love ever gave her thoughts more entirely to the hero who had won her than did this mature woman to her far-off lover. Little Horace was allowed to run at will, and if he went swimming in the lake his mother was too much absorbed in dreams of good Samuel to have any fears for the safety of the child.

If her father or mother repined she tried to console them with the hope of a rich son-in-law, who was not a speculator, and infuse her own rose-color into their old lives. The prospect did cheer them, and Horace smiled grimly while she portrayed the happy future. Even he began to think it well that John had died, for he never could have got another start on nothing but that Indian pony!

After a while it seemed to Isadore that a letter should certainly come, but the days went by all the same, and not a word came from her lover. Then she sat down with her pen, which used to be very skilful in letter-writing, and poured out her soul to Samuel. She wrote much and long, telling him how ardently she adored him, and how heavily time hung on her hands in waiting so long to hear. Then after this she waited more patiently, until it was time for an answer.

But even the remotest bound of that time went by and she heard not a word. Then she began to tremble, as young maidens are apt to when they have a suspicion that their lover has proved false. She ceased to sing about the house, and the old folks noticed the change, but disliked to ask their pet lamb why these sounds of joy had turned to silence. They feared she had been disappointed, and so were considerate enough not to probe the wound by any questions.

How is it with good Samuel Torrence through all these weary days? Did he really plan to disappoint Isadore as revenge for her treatment when they were young? Oh no, he was not that kind of a man. He was a true and honest gentleman, and when he went

West to "look land," he went most to see Isadore, whom he knew in childhood, and whose queenly figure and flashing eyes had formed a pretty picture on the background of his life, notwithstanding he had been quite as happy with his wife, Hannah, as often falls to the lot of mortals. But Hannah was gone to her rest now, and he knew John had gone too; and why not tell his love to Isadore, and take to himself a second wife? Such occurrences are not uncommon among the children of men.

So it was with an honest, upright purpose that he made the journey and promised the letters. In fact, he, too, was in the deeps of this attachment equally far with Widow Smith. He dreamed of her and thought about her continually, and pictured to himself the complete bliss which would be his when they two should become one.

And when he arrived at his fine old home in Otsego the first thing he set himself about was the writing of a letter to his sweetheart. He filled a whole sheet. He recounted incidents of his journey. He repeated his love in several new and original forms of expression, more striking than romantic. He took a look into the future, and painted a not unlovely picture—seeing he was not a painter by trade—of the very happy condition to which he looked forward. He read the letter over carefully. He punctuated it. He made several capital letters where he thought they belonged, and it had slipped his mind while writing. He inscribed it. Then he leaned back in his chair, and called his son James, who sat playing "fox and geese" with his sister Amy, to take the letter to the

office. James took the letter and bounded off. Samuel went down to his store, which unfortunately lay in the opposite direction from the post-office.

Presently James returned. He was fourteen, and sensible. He remembered his mother. He did not stop to think how "awful wicked" it is to open another person's letters, but he went up stairs, clear up to the garret, and read all the sweet things his father had said to this strange woman. His young soul was on fire. It was not a year since his mother walked about these pleasant rooms, and "to think that father should say he loves another woman!"

He called his sister. She read the letter, and burst into tears. Amy was older than James, and had all the horror of a stepmother which girls of that age entertain.

"Don't cry, sis. That woman is not coming here to walk where my mother did."

"What shall we do, James?"

"I'll burn the infernal letter."

"But that would be wrong, and father would just write again. It wouldn't do any good."

"I'll burn every letter he gives me! I will!"

"Oh no, dear brother, you must not do that. We shall have to bear it, I suppose. But it seems as though my heart would break. I can't see another in my dear mother's place. It is too bad! And not a year yet since mother died!"

James walked to the fire and dropped the letter in. The fire in his heart was so hot at this thought that he could not reason. In fact, he did not try to reason, but when Isadore's letter came he saw it first, for he

watched the office incessantly. He sent it to keep company with his father's.

And when good Samuel sat down and wrote again, upbraiding Widow Smith for her broken promise, and, as usual, called James to take it to the office, it never saw the light of any eyes. James burned it unread.

And as the time went by this lover, who was honest and easy, gave up in despair. He thought it was one of Isadore's old tricks, and said in his heart she might go.

A quiet, sweet-faced woman kept his house. James and Amy loved her more and more as the months went by. Samuel Torrence saw this, and made the way smooth for her to remain until death did them part, and the children were glad of a stepmother whom they could love.

Before Mr. Torrence entered into this permanent partnership with his housekeeper he wrote one last explanatory letter to Mrs. Smith. He spoke of the repeated epistles which had preceded this one, and in somewhat plain terms told her his impressions, assuring her at the same time that she had not broken his heart by the course she had pursued, for another had gradually won her way to its possession, and he should be married very soon.

James had seen no letter addressed to Mrs. Smith for some time, and this one disturbed him greatly. He feared his vigilance had not prevented his father from receiving news from the West, to which this was an answer. He went to the office with it, but did not leave it there. It reposed in the pocket of his roundabout for several days, and when his father

came in one Sunday afternoon bringing the minister, and in less than an hour afterwards he and Amy found themselves saying "mother," he thought it could do no harm for this letter to make its journey.

Isadore had lived in suspense a whole year, and it had worn upon her. She could not give up her beautiful dream, and yet the foundations on which her hope rested seemed like "the baseless fabric of a vision." She greatly desired to go to Otsego, and visit old friends, and then she could fathom this mystery. There was but one thing in the way of going, and that was quite an important item to be sure, but she thought she could surmount the barrier. Since her heart had been softened so by the presence of its tender guest, she had answered one or two of Mercy's letters, which now came without disguise, bearing their substantial tokens of filial remembrance. So in responding to one of these she mentioned her desire to visit the old place, and withal spoke of her health, which was delicate, and needed the change, but she could not afford to make the journey.

Mercy thought about her sister's lonely and saddened life,—she knew nothing of the new lover,—and it seemed hard that so much joy as the visit would confer should be missed for want of a little money. And yet she knew not how to add anything to the regular remittance. They were obliged to calculate and economize more closely than ever, for the meeting-house was now under way, and Wesley desired to hurry it to completion as rapidly as possible. She thought for several days of nothing else, and tried to hit on some plan whereby she could raise

so much money. But the way looked hedged. She had one jewel, only one — a gold chain which descended to her from her aunt, for whom she was named. She prized it for the source from whence it came, and it was hard to think of that in connection with its value in dollars. Had she purchased it of the shopkeeper she could have parted with it without pain, for Mercy had no great love for jewels. As it was she thought she would consult Wesley first, and may be he could see some other way.

But Wesley said he was already in debt with the house more heavily than was safe for him, and if Isadore must go to Otsego perhaps the chain had better be sold than that he should loan any more money. Thus strengthened for the sacrifice Mercy sold the chain, and sent every dollar of its equivalent to Isadore, feeling very happy in doing what she could for her only sister, who had suffered so much.

Isadore counted the money and thought she could get a new dress out of it. This would delay the journey somewhat, but as the dress seemed a desirable possession she bought it, and was busy among its folds when good Samuel's letter, so long expected, really appeared. She dropped her needle to read the precious document, every word of which, instead of dropping honey, seemed a defiant taunt. It was not like the letters she hungered for, not like the letters which Samuel acknowledged he had written, and poor Isadore was in a paroxysm of rage and grief. Evidently somebody had determined to divide them; somebody had read all her precious words, and his, too! Perhaps it would be too late for explanations

when she arrived in Otsego. The very thought set her brain on fire. To have such a chalice dashed from her lips when they might have sipped its sweets was a tormenting thought too hard to bear. The humiliation of finding him the husband of another woman would be too severe for endurance, and yet while there was the bare possibility of success she dared the consequences. She folded the unfinished dress, and made haste to depart. As Horace and Eunice repeated little messages to this and that old friend Isadore did not hear them, so busy was she with the haunting fear of being too late. It did not occur to this frantic woman that the promise which Samuel confessed having made to another would be at all binding. She only thought how plain she could make the matter by reading all her letters, which fortunately she had preserved, after having copied them carefully for the eye she sought to please.

She made all haste to reach her destination, and was impatient of delays, and after much fretting and fearing, in the midst of small hope, she had the satisfaction of touching the soil of her native land, and sitting down by the hearthstone of an old neighbor.

She could hardly wait to exchange the civilities of this meeting, and refresh herself with the proffered cup of tea, before inquiring, very casually of course, and, in the midst of inquiries about others whom she had known, if Samuel Torrence was living still in Otsego.

"Oh, then, you knew Sam, didn't ye? Well, did you ever know Joanna Hale? old Deacon Hale's

daughter out to Butternuts, he that used to point his finger so when he talked in meetin'?"

Isadore did not seem to recall the deacon, neither his daughter Joanna. Her friend continued:—

"Well, you knew Sam Torrence married Hannah Morse for his first wife, and she died well on to two years ago, and now he's jest been and married Joanna Hale. They say the children put him up to it. They set a sight by Joanna. She went right there when Miss Torrence died, and has been real good to James and Amy, and that's the way to a widder's heart, through his children. Why, Miss Smith, you must be real tired! Lie down here on this lounge and kind o' rest yourself. Here, take my smellin'-bottle. Oh, the woman has fainted! Jane!"

Jane came and helped to apply restoratives, and Isadore, herself again, said she never knew that travelling upset a body so, and she guessed she had better go to bed.

After she was all alone she thought this affair all over. Joanna Hale had been good to the children and they liked her. She remembered Samuel spoke with a good deal of pride of his two children. May be they liked Joanna so well they were determined to have her stay there and so intercepted the letters. Now she thought of it, Mr. Torrence had said James was very helpful about the house since his mother died. May be he went to the post-office. She distinctly remembered that white, taper fingers belonging to an older hand than James' had done something at that wicked business years ago. Had the ghost of her evil deeds come forth from the buried past to haunt

her? Alas! she never had dreamed that the same aloe could be steeped for her. But she drank them now to the very dregs. Her heart which had flowered in Autumn was suddenly chilled. The world looked very dark now. Nothing, nothing to live for! She forgot her child, so utterly had this love for Samuel engrossed her. And when she hurried back home, so soon that the old neighbors thought it didn't pay to come, she was weakly groping after a ray of light which seemed farther off than the stars.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FRUITION.

THE meeting-house, so long desired and struggled for, came to perfection at last. It stood fair, on the plains of Vinetown, its modest spire set in fine relief against the background of the Alleghanies. Dr. Sanford looked upon the finished work with a grateful heart. It had been long delayed, and the offering he wanted to lay on the altar of the Lord, in the very beginning of active life, could not be fitly framed until he was some little distance away from the landmarks of youth. But I think the very defeats he had suffered made the victory more precious. This long waiting made the ripened fruit of his desire sweeter than honey or the honeycomb.

And now that a place had been prepared where to worship God undisturbed, the good doctor thought some public acknowledgment of the gratitude due for this success ought to be made by the inhabitants of the village. Accordingly he planned to dedicate the house after the custom of the older sects. In setting apart a day for this observance he consulted with Mercy, and they determined to do all in their power to render it a day to be long remembered, not only in the village, but by their own house. So the two sat

down and wrote urgent letters to Horace and Eunice Ryder, and Isadore Smith, to be with them on this important occasion. They wanted to have a family re-union, and fully believed the time had come for the Ryders to acknowledge their children. They were old now, and Wesley and Mercy yearned to extract the thorns that pierced them ere they went their way through the dark valley.

Isadore, humbled by the chastening which she had endured, was ready to respond to this request; but her father and mother, though they had been almost solely dependent upon Dr. Sanford for the past ten years, could not make up their minds to go, especially on such an occasion. It was a heavy cross, and they were too weak in Christian graces to lift it. They debated, and recounted other days, and thought of their poverty which they could endure better alone, and at last allowed Isadore to go without them. After she was gone they talked about it, and wished they had strength enough to go to these children and ask their forgiveness. They had softened in feeling as life was measured out to them in comfort by the despised son-in-law, but how to say it to the two whom they had wronged they knew not.

The only path for the transgressor to walk, if he would shake off his load of guilt, is that of confession to the one whom he has wronged. They knew all about recounting their shortcomings in their prayers, and sometimes this abuse of their children was reckoned thus, in terms which were general, and might mean something else. But they grew no more at ease after this repetition. God did not stoop to work a

miracle in their behalf. He did not bestow forgiveness on Horace and Eunice Ryder in any unnatural way. He had given the law to them, and if the old class-leader persisted in his blindness he must suffer until his eyes were opened to see it. Hundreds of times he had prayed, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors," and still he forgave not his debtor, and so he was not forgiven, did not feel easy; did not feel at peace with his children, Wesley and Mercy. He spoke the words of the prayer without understanding them. He thought if he prayed it was enough. He did not see that the prayer involves a law which runs with even and exact justice through all the avenues of society, and that the Lawgiver himself never deviates from the rule He has made. But we can pardon the blindness of Horace Ryder, suffering his uneasiness and gnawing pain, because pride stands between him and confession to his children, which alone can bring him peace. He has lived in the bosom of a church which thinks it has no accounts to reckon with any but God, forgetting that it cannot secure His pardon and benediction except through human means, that it is forgiven only as it forgives; a church which confesses often enough in its prayers, thinking that the end of all duty, when indeed this humility before the throne should become only personal preparation for humility in the presence of those whom we have wronged, and who suffer at our hands, and should pave the way for restoration and harmony between alienated brethren. Forgiveness is a condition of reconciliation and harmony with man, and so with God, the Father of men, high above the need of

our services to be sure, and so he has made us instruments in the welfare of our fellows, and laid the foundations of our peace in the love and justice which we exercise in daily intercourse, and the ready reparation with which we follow any consummated wrong.

When all the world knows that it cannot settle the score of its red-handed sins by confessing them in prayers, but must go straight to the wronged man or woman and square accounts with them, the native pride of the human heart will keep it from transgression. We can tell our shortcomings in the ear of God, too often unblushingly, He is so high and holy, and far off, but to go to the man whom we have defamed, or whose sheep we have stolen, and confess that we started that mean slander, or carry the sheep on our shoulders home, is a trial which few will covet; and so I say when the world knows that it is forgiven as it forgives the very instincts of human nature will be a bulwark of defence. How we have walked so long blindly I know not. If we stopped and looked into our own hearts we could not fail of learning this lesson. But we have looked to the priests, and they have divorced religion from practical life until we have forgotten to read the indications of our acts.

God grant this church in Vinetown, to the dedication of which many souls are on the way, may be instrumental in restoring the marriage covenant between faith and life; and that the men and women who bow in worship before this altar may learn as they pray to "our Father in heaven" that the words are more than empty sounds, and out of them grows naturally, like a tree from its roots, the brotherhood of

the human race, a clear conception of which will unfold the path of human duty in all its intricate windings and show us the foundations of peace on earth.

As though no shadow had ever fallen between them Mercy received her sister. And when Wesley added his welcome, so hearty and honest, she was quite broken down, and in the midst of tears she asked them to forgive her for the wicked things she had done, and the trouble she had caused them. They assured her they had done so in heart long ago, and were glad of the chance of telling her so, and henceforth they desired to live as though there were no dark background to their lives and the past was utterly forgotten.

It seemed almost cruel after this that Elder Marks should take for his text, "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again," for Isadore took each pointed sentence as aimed at herself, and her heart was probed anew because of the letters she intercepted; and she believed then and forever that the same measure had been dealt to her in justice.

But the Elder who knew his friend had strained every nerve to build this house, and that he had lacked many things because he was determined to do it, had no other thought than to make this special application while he unfolded a general law. "We spend ourselves for the good of others," he said, "and the very work we do for them blesses us the most. The good measure comes back, pressed down and shaken together. We do an evil act. We wrong a friend, perhaps a brother or a sister, and the unfolding years reveal the truth that our own souls receive the wound, and bear the scar which we thought we

thrust upon another. The measure we mete comes back to us, whether good or bad. God holds the cup in his righteous hand, and if we fill up aloes for our brother man He will press wormwood and gall to our lips, until we learn to do justly and walk humbly."

"It has come back to me," said Isadore, "bitterly, bitterly! Would to God I had known that he that doeth wrong must receive for the wrong which he hath done!"

When the services of dedication were over a soul which knew what it was to suffer went out feeling its burden, but hoping for relief as it looked into an opening future full of opportunity, where some measure of good works might bring their blessed balm to heal the wounds of evil deeds.

Now that Elder Marks could lift up his voice in Vinetown at any season of the year without fear of the elements, he made his home at Dr. Sanford's somewhat more than ever, though he had been a frequent visitor there all through the past. The spirit and power which had attended his ministry in other places began to be felt in the valley of the Alleghany, and from far and near the people flocked to hear him, until the new church was full to overflowing. Many from the communion of other churches ventured to inquire of this faith, and their presence on one occasion was almost a sure augury of the accession of new souls to this congregation.

Inquiry and discussion were brought to bear upon the growing interest awakened by his preaching, and from every such encounter the infant church came off victorious and with increased numbers. The circuit

FRUITION.

ministers could not discuss successfully questions which had gone down to the very deeps of being in the heart of his opponent, and whose foundations and bearings he understood equally well with themselves. Superadded to his knowledge of these was an intensity of feeling which touched and swayed his hearers, fastening their attention, and ensuring their sympathy, until they too, saw the first dawn of that day of which Christ is the perfect light.

When Dr. Sanford sat down with his growing family in the house which he had builded, and through all the little currents of influence which were now running out from his deed, he was as happy in his reflections as mortal man can well be. His children would be saved from the blight which fell upon his own young life, and the light which was set in the school-house windows to guide him away from the gulf which threatened him he had been instrumental in kindling in a wider place, where the growing civilization of a rich and promising State might feel the effulgence through all the avenues of its law and liberty.

And though he had done what few men ever embarrassed his own affairs and even mortgaged his small home to pay for this house, he was full of hope that the good Lord, who watches the sparrow's fall, would hold his feet from any troublesome snare, and set him at last in a safe place.

He fully believed the men of Vinetown would rise and bear some small share of the burden, believing they would see him sold out of a shelter for his babes, because he had sought to shelter the souls

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theirs. But time went by, and the men of Vinetown failed to fulfil their promise of help. Over the house of Dr. Sanford, which opened its welcome on his wedding day, and where his children had first seen the light, hung an imperative doom. Either himself must dispose of it, or soon the hammer of the auctioneer would peal its destiny. The mortgage had nearly run out. The doctor faced this inevitability with a brave heart, and was looking about for a purchaser. Some other roof could shelter his babes, but not every door would open to the advocacy of his faith. He remembered the bolts which shut away a waiting congregation from the poor accommodations of the village school-house, and was determined this bulwark of his faith should not be suffered to fall. Better that a single home remove its landmarks, though consecrated by the dearest memories of domestic love, than that any soul should miss the light of life, because the darkness of debt had gathered about the windows of the Lord's house.

While this noble resolve waited actual consummation word came of the death of Dr. Sales. He had gone, as the good and true are privileged to go, hopefully and peacefully out of the life that now is. The mantle of an honorable career wrapped him softly, and over his head gathered the white light of many years. In all the community his memory was precious, and his name was spoken reverently by lips whose pallor his skill had changed to roses.

Dr. Sanford went immediately to C——, that the lone widow might feel the presence of one ready to be her friend and helper in this hour of trial.

He found her sitting in the valley of the shadow of death, a broken reed, with no desire for life now that she was left alone. In vain he tried to call her back to an interest in the friends who gathered about her. She longed to follow her husband. The way seemed all plain and full of light. She only asked to go and that right early. And before the doctor could return to Vinetown her grave was fashioned close by her husband's side. God had answered the prayer of her aged heart, and the two were reunited forever.

Dr. Sales, true to his jesting promise of long ago, had made Susan his heir. There were a few legacies, the largest — a thousand dollars — to Dr. Sanford, and the bulk of his estate, consisting of a fine house in C —, and a farm just on the outskirts of the town, to his "beloved child, Susan Rice Sanford."

As soon as the business could be properly adjusted, Dr. Sanford hastened home to impart to his family the sensible relief which his friend's kind remembrance had been to his own heart. The mortgage was paid, — the church was free, and the old home-roof could still bend lovingly above his little family. In their gratitude they acknowledged God the giver of all good, the creator of friends, and the inspiration of the highest forms of friendship.

This inheritance which had fallen to Susan was received by her with silent joy and thanksgivings which were voiceless, but which came from the deep places of a heart that knew the straits of poverty and suffering. Charles was almost jubilant over the good news. He did not know Dr. Sales and therefore felt none of the softening influences of bereavement which

touched the heart of his wife. She had lost a friend who had been to her a father, and this gift he had left her would be a continual reminder of his absence from the body. Charles saw only the wider places it would open to his ambition, and the summit of his desire, of which he had grown almost hopeless, now gained at a single leap. His native generosity could now have a voice, too.

"You have had nothing from home, Wesley. I have had the use of all that was father's, and now he proposes to give me a deed of the whole."

"I had my time for a profession, Charles."

"So did I have my time for an education. I think we should share this farm equally; though now we have so much property in Ohio to look after I wish you had the whole of it. Will you take it all, Wesley?"

"No, my brother. That would not be right. But if father desires to give me half in consideration of your good fortune I will accept it."

The deeds were made out, and the brothers owned equally the river-farm, which they agreed to let on shares, while Charles and Susan made hasty preparations to remove to C——, and take possession of the fine old home left them by good Dr. Sales.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ACROSS THE RIVER.

LUDON SANFORD gathered up his robes for the mysterious journey. He had long sat in the house leaning on his staff, waiting, waiting; and when the summons of the Guide came to his ear, so dull with age, he started up to hear and follow, and the benediction of gray hairs no longer fell across the sunlighted paths of his grandchildren who ran on willing errands so many times for the feet that had suddenly become still.

Across the river, in luminous white, I think he caught the vision of Rachel reaching out her beckoning hands. There was nothing behind but toil and weariness and heartache, while before him stretched away the land of peace and rest, where Rachel had been securely sheltered while he waited God's time. I wonder not he heard the summons gladly. I wonder not he made haste to depart. His whole life had been a struggle with adverse winds, and now that perfect silence wrapped him round he welcomed its embrace.

Wesley and Charles wished they could make his grave under the willow in Otsego; but that could not be. So the requiem above his bed of rest is not the

singing Susquehanna; but near him the Alleghanies lift their emerald heads, pine-crowned and hoary, and the river creeps through sun and shade as it sends its refreshing waters to his very feet. And in the haven he has found I think it matters not whether the same river keeps green the grass above his grave and Rachel's, since God whom they both worshipped holds the sea in the hollow of His hand.

Somewhere I know He has made room for these long-divided souls, and where they abide is heaven.

The departure of Loudon Sanford left a shadow in the house of his children. Death was a strange guest in these homes. A gloom hung over the whole community when even one soul was missed in the march of life. Susan's little children crept about with awe upon their faces, and pondered over questions too heavy for their years. The words of the minister at his funeral rung in their ears, and they wondered what was meant by "after death, the judgment." The sweet faith of their mother, cherished as it was in the secret places of her own soul, they knew nothing about. She had never dreamed that their young minds were reaching beyond the present with its sun and rain. And, then, she was too full of work-day cares to be a patient teacher had she known the need. To her this separation was the beginning of all holy joys to her revered father. She had no fears for him, and none for any who pass the river into the nearer presence and tenderer care of the good God. This faith had come to her in the ripeness of life, and so she did not think a child may suffer because of too intense thought on the mysteries of the hereafter.

She measured her own children by herself, not reckoning the subtle influences of their father's life, which were singing in their souls, and making them keenly sensitive and singularly apprehensive.

But Susan Sanford was not alone in her mistake. Nearly all the world measure children in the same way, and are unpardonably oblivious of the different care and culture needed by different organisms. The daughter is cramped into the mother's pattern, and the son commanded to follow his father's lead, when, perhaps, a law is written on the souls of each requiring an interpretation which must be wrought out by entirely dissimilar lives. Many a child suffers mental torture because of the rustle of some husk of a creed, sent shivering through its young soul by some saintly old aunt, or dropped empty from the table of the priest, who should *feed* the lambs and carry them in his bosom.

From the lips of the minister whose mission, had he known it, was to "comfort all who mourn," words fell which haunted many after years of the life of Susan's eldest child, and made even her school-books lose their charm. Not until she was able to "search the Scriptures" for herself, and hide away under the green of summer trees while she read and thought, did the brooding shadow flee away.

In the midst of the gloom and mystery of Loudon Sanford's death the necessity of change obtruded. The old rocking-chair in which he had sat, leaning on his staff, found its place very soon upon the emigrant wagon. His cane, with its ivory head, which had proved an inadequate support the last time he went

out to watch the ripening melons, was safely packed away by the slender fingers of his grandchild, who helped him climb the steps as he returned from the garden. And the old Bible, over which so many precious memories gathered, memories of the long past, and of the old home on the Susquehanna, she laid carefully away, touching its gray leaves reverently, as though under its lid grouped not only precious family memories, but old-time mysteries too intricate for present solution. The lids of a little trunk were lifted, and the cap he wore was laid beside Rachel's bonnet, to be kept as relics of two lives which had finished their course in faithfulness and peace.

Susan's hopeful spirit felt a chill of apprehension in view of this change. Charles had expressed his determination to live in the house which Dr. Sales had occupied, and keep a tenant on the farm as the doctor had done. Susan thought it better to live on the farm, and rent the house in the village. But somehow Charles seemed to think there would be no longer any need of the hard work of the past. He could fold his hands in rest and wait the current of events. No doubt the villagers would sooner accord to him that intellectual pre-eminence, of which he felt conscious, than a community of farmers. They would be more acute in judgment, more appreciative. And he had farmed long enough; he was tired of farming. He wanted change. Accordingly the family took possession of the village house. It was in fine repair, and handsomely furnished. The children ran about the pretty rooms with hearts unusually buoyant. Susan felt readily at home, and appreciated the comforts of

which she had long been deprived. Charles breathed an atmosphere native to one born a king, as he was, and readily fitted into the wider places. He had leisure now for farther search in the intellectual realm, and improved his privilege with the enthusiasm of other days. He brushed the cobwebs from his old Latin books, whose lore he had not been called to teach in the valley of the Alleghany, and re-read them with delight. He also studied German, and could soon speak and write the melifluous tongue. The days and weeks went on, and Susan's apprehensions were allayed, and light pervaded the house, and joy filled every heart.

The villagers were very deferential to the strangers. They acknowledged intuitively the fine type of which the head of this house was a representative. They saw it reproduced in his children, not in look or outward grace, but in rare and precocious strength. They distanced all rivals at the village school. They were orderly in manner, and old for the years they had counted.

The best among the villagers were drawn into the circle of acquaintance and friendship, and for a while life in C — was almost paradise to the Sanfords. Even Winters, the grocer, did homage to the genius of his new neighbor, and acknowledged the soundness of Susan's judgment in her decision. But Winters was happily settled now. The green blinds were open again. The faces of little children were often seen at the windows. The flowers in his garden were doubly thrifty and fragrant, and Winters was a happy man.

C — was hotly engaged in politics. It was the autumn of a presidential election. She had plenty of

enthusiasm, fire, and feeling, but poor scape-valves, except in illuminations and torchlight processions. Her leading lawyer could make but a poor speech, and unfortunately, or fortunately, for the predominant sentiment of the place, he was a Whig.

The opposition party felt of the student, very cautiously, more than half believing he was not of their number. But Charles Sanford was a Democrat, and not a bit slow in avowing his sentiments when he was called upon for an opinion. In fact, he made quite a speech right there in his own parlor in defence of his favorite candidate. His besiegers saw his power; the Whig lawyer could not talk like that. Now if they could only draw this man into the arena their cause would shine.

Next day Sanford received a note, signed by the leading men of the place, inviting him to address them on political matters at his earliest convenience. The note was couched in flattering terms, and Charles was a good deal elated over it. His opportunity had certainly come. He sent a favorable answer to their invitation, and appointed an evening for the speech.

The time was only a week ahead, but during that week Charles had made "intellectual research" in quite a new channel. He was not accustomed to preparing political speeches, but he had the pen of a ready writer, and succeeded beyond his most sanguine hopes. There seemed little chance for the existence of log-cabins or hard-cider barrels in that refined society which his polished sentences so graphically portrayed.

The simple villagers listened in rapt wonder to the effort of their fellow-townsmen. Even the Whig law-

yer was so dazzled he could not see his way clear to make another political effort during the campaign. He subsided into the quiet of his small office and gave his time to his clients ; and as the Democrats had no more opposition, they rested on the laurels which each one appropriated from the great and silencing speech of Charles Sanford.

But the fame thereof flew on the wings of the autumn wind. Other villages sent for this wonderful speaker. He was gratified by this evidence of success, and the shouts of applause resounded from other and wider places as he went readily at these repeated calls. He made himself known all over the legislative district, and wherever his voice was heard the people marked him as their future candidate for a seat at the capitol. His grave manner in dealing with questions of State pleased all the solid men of whatever party, and that, together with his fine personal presence, won largely upon public favor, and many resolved to vote for him if he would consent to run, though his ballot in the halls of legislation might be counter to their opinions. They would be proud of such a representative, no matter what were his sentiments. Such was the enthusiasm awakened wherever Charles appeared. No such man had ever spoken to them before ; and from these excursions he returned flushed with success and full of satisfaction ; for had he not reached the acme of his hopes, and been called "greatest" by the united testimony of all whom he had addressed ?

And the joy in his house grew more and more complete, for the eye of the husband and father was clear as the blue heavens.

CHAPTER XXXV.

FORGIVENESS.

YES, we will go to him instantly, Mercy; and I think we had better take the children."

These were the first words of Dr. Sanford on reading Isadore's letter. She had written of the severe illness of Horace Ryder. The doctor had given him up, and in the delirium of disease he called the names of Wesley and Mercy. Isadore wanted them to come. She thought her father would forgive his children when he saw the gates of eternity opening to receive him.

They hastened to his bedside; but a hundred miles was some impediment in the way of their desire. It was overpast though in good time. Dr. Sanford kept fleet horses. How the wilderness had blossomed since Mercy went over that path! "The world is growing fairer," she said to her husband as they travelled; "but are we? Alas, the mother looks little like the bride, I fear!"

"You are fairer in soul, my wife. You have blossomed as well as this wilderness. And to me you can never be other than fair though the snows of age should fall upon you. Ripeness comes with years. We are not prepared for the highest possible joys while the

roses of youth are on our faces. The bearded man and the woman who leads her children are happier than the lover or the bride."

"Yes, happier, Wesley. It was not of that I spoke. But in passing over this road it was natural that I remember the fair bride in contrast with the wrinkled mother."

"Do you think the wilderness fairer than these cornfields and orchards heavy with fruit? O, no. You said the wilderness had blossomed. Young Nature has matured, and we never think of calling her wrinkled and old because her primitive appearances have passed away. Neither are we older or less fair. The soul, which I reckon the essential man, has attributes of perpetual growth and the power of consummate renewal when the house it occupies no longer serves its purposes. Our bodies may fade and fall, but the 'house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens,' awaits our occupancy, and it is constructed of immortal atoms."

As they looked upon the shattered frame of Horace Ryder, so changed from its last appearance to them, these children felt in their souls that the way of the hard-hearted and unforgiving is scarcely less hard than that of the transgressor.

He looked wildly upon Wesley and Mercy without any sign of recognition, and immediately relapsed into incoherent ravings. Their names were among the broken utterances of the old man, and coupled with them, the words, "lost," "shame," "money!"

Eunice said it had nearly killed her husband being obliged to receive help from Wesley. It had broken

him down more than the loss of his farm. So she explained the tenor of his ravings. It was painful to witness them and know they were the voice of a soul out of right relations with its fellow-man ; a soul which had not neglected to cry aloud and often to God for help, and when He sent it through human instruments had failed to consider it God-sent. The instruments were not to his liking. Had the church bought the house and sent the monthly stipend which kept the wolf from Horace Ryder's door for many years he would have accepted it gratefully as coming from heaven. But the church brought little parcels, and never those after Horace's mysterious supply.

To be sheltered and fed by one whose "infidelity" and "poverty" had been the burden of his objection to the alliance was a scorching rebuke to Horace, whose pride would not let him change these coals of fire into rivers of oil as he might have done. Infidels are often sharp moralists, but is their rule of life "overcome evil with good?" This had been the rule of Wesley Sanford's life. He believed it to be the way God deals with men. He thought it would never have been commanded as the basis of human action if it were not the basis on which God acts. He believed in its efficacy to melt the stubborn heart and dispel its hatred ; though he saw in Horace Ryder an instance of persistence which he deemed impossible to a soul created in God's image. He had hugged his hate down to the verge of death. He had refused to acknowledge the hand that fed him or be grateful in any way for his daily bread.

Dr. Sanford desired right relations with all men.

He believed in a practical human brotherhood. His faith had never for a moment wavered that one day he should be acknowledged as child by Mercy's father. And even now he watched for signs of consciousness in full trust of this happy result.

As a physician he contributed his skill toward allaying the excitement of the sufferer. He knew from the first that age and disease had too firm a hold for any promise of restored health; but may be he could set reason on the throne once more before the mysterious separation of soul and clay. After several hours, in which the doctor had used his utmost skill to exorcise the "devil" which tore Horace Ryder, there were feeble indications of a change. The sick man slept. This gave the doctor hope. When he opened his eyes at last the wild light was gone. His reason had returned; so thought those about his bed, until he spoke again. But though not now insane, reason and the near approach of death had brought no change. He looked upon Wesley and Mercy, then upon their children. "You have troubled me enough," he said.

Mercy burst into tears at these cold words.

"Father," cried Isadore, "forgive and bless your children before you die."

"Die! must I die? O God! am I a saint? What are saints? Why, they are praying men, such as I have been all my life. I thought they were happy men, too, but I'm in torment. What's the use of being a saint? It don't bring peace. No, it don't. I've had no peace — since — since — Mercy went off."

"Father, you have not forgiven me for going; that is why you have had no peace."

"I've prayed God to forgive you times without number."

"Pray again, dear father. Let us say the Lord's prayer together."

Mercy began, but no voice spoke the divine words with her. When she came to the words, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" she spoke them slowly, as though listening to their wealth of meaning, which so few who repeat them know how to understand. It was a scene of singular and impressive beauty, that daughter's prayer by her dying father's bed. When she opened her eyes Horace Ryder was looking upon her like one in a dream. For some time his eyes were fixed upon the face of his child, but whether he lived or had already passed the river those about him could not tell from any sign of motion, even the faintest breath.

"You said that is why I have no peace, because I have not forgiven?"

"Yes, father, I said so, because the Lord says so in His prayer, 'forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.' He does not forgive us unless we first forgive our fellow-men. I think there can be no peace in our hearts unless God has forgiven us."

"You think God has not forgiven me?"

"If He had you would be at peace, and you said you had felt no peace since I went away."

"I cannot see. God answers prayer. I've prayed for forgiveness and peace."

"God answers prayer. He requires work also, and an effort on our part to gain the peace we crave. God forgives us our debts as we forgive our debtors."

If we don't forgive, plainly God don't forgive us. Forgiveness is peace."

"O God! can't somebody pray for me? I'm too weak. O for one hour of peace before I die."

Dr. Sanford knelt beside his father's bed and prayed with the spirit and power of one of his faith. When he had closed, the old man's hand was resting on his head, and Mercy, too, knelt beside him, and he placed the other upon hers.

His lips moved faintly, and they heard the word, "peace," "peace." It was his last word; and his children knew by that he had at last forgiven. In the white light of eternity he will learn much which he failed to see in time, and somehow, somewhere, Horace Ryder will grow into a saint.

Eunice and Isadore and young Horace took up their abode with Dr. Sanford. For years the old mother was an invalid, helpless as the smallest child. Her children watched her patiently, and helped her as they could, smoothing the way for her decrepid age, until at last she too found rest by the side of the penitent class-leader.

Life went on smoothly within, a little rough in its outward struggle with the elements. The needs of a growing family and the long sickness exhausted the doctor's supplies, and he had a hard fight with poverty, more severe than after the building of the meeting-house. But forever his faith failed not, and though the outward man toiled and suffered the inward man was renewed day by day.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THROUGH THE VALLEY.

THE nomination of Charles Sanford and his election to a seat in the State Legislature were a certain thing after the triumphal canvass. He did not stump the district in favor of his own election, but contented himself with laurels already won. Indeed, when he was informed of the success which attended his name, he did not venture a speech in reply, but assured the deputation from his chamber window that he was indisposed—an assurance which the tones of his voice abundantly testified, and had not the darkness screened his face, that, too, would have added its evidence.

Some of the leading politicians in C—— were men of unrestrained appetites, ready for excessive indulgence whenever a generous soul with a full purse helped to make up the company. These men had drawn their candidate into the circle, and eaten and drank many times and oft at his expense.

As the tavern was but a step from his own door, Sanford managed to find the way to that, and climb the stairs to his bedroom, before his heavy potations had taken their extreme effect, and these constituents were not aware how much this admired man was a victim and a slave.

When the time came for him to take his seat in the capitol, it was not the clear eye which lent such a light to the whole countenance when he made the "great speech," that looked out of his symmetrical face. A leaden haze had gathered over it, obscuring the brilliant intellect, and as one and another looked upon this new member, whose fame had preceded him, they were disappointed. Their expectations had painted a different picture on which there was no blot.

The work which was so confidently expected of him was not performed. He cast his ballot, when he was in his seat, and as often on one side as the other. From first to last of the session it might be said in truth Charles Sanford was not in the hall; but one answered to his name who had opened his splendid temple, so lately and so hopefully swept and garnished, to be the habitation of "seven other devils," so the last state of this man was worse than ever before. And when he returned to C——, his wife looked upon a wreck which made her heart sink in despair. In vain she tried to save him from the gulf which threatened. He was not himself, and therefore her reasoning fell upon dull ears. The old circle gathered about him. The old influences wove their inextricable network. Shadows filled the house, shadows ominous of coming evil, the awful consummation of such a career. About the brain of the husband and father gathered spectres, awful and tormenting. He found no longer the deep sleep of early indulgence. He could not sleep. The "sweet restorer" forsook his eyes, and even slumber his eyelids.

Then with glaring eyeballs he walked the old rooms

by night and day as though some fearful presence was on his track. His children fled at his approach; they skulked and hid in terror of their *father*. Susan guarded him continually. She locked away every dangerous thing. She followed him if he passed the portal of the house, and by a subtle power which none other had over him she confined his walks to their own garden, or drove to the farm, where he would measure miles in his aimless marches.

Day by day he grew worse. There was no hope. The balance of the mind was utterly shaken. No drug in the doctor's prescription for such a malady, none powerful to cure. When the relations of mind and body are deranged by subtle poison they cannot be readjusted. No hand so skilful as to eliminate that poison. It is deadly. It kills soonest those who are keenest strung. If a man is but small remove from a beast he will bear a degree of this poison which would wreck him who is but "little lower than the angels."

The end came. It was a fearful end. Susan had been so watchful! so sleepless for many nights! She followed his every step. She thought she did. But she was worn out. Waking from momentary oblivion she missed his steps; she missed his wail, his constant regretful words, which were like arrows in the hearts of those who loved him. She looked over the rooms—he was not in the house; the garden—he was not there. With the help of her eldest son she drove quickly to the farm. They two explored its wide reaches. It was a lonely search. Gorgeous summer was over all, over the rustling

corn, over the grass and the orchard. It sent lances of gold through the forest as they threaded its intricate ways. But this mother and her boy saw no summer glory; they saw no light of sun. Gloom like midnight mantled all the world to them. The very air was dense with darkness. They heard no song of bird, they saw no life. With hands clasped, each in each, they looked upon death! The wail that had pierced them was still forever in all the world. The wild eyes were shut, the lips sealed. And—was it so?—a smile played over their cold pallor. But there was no consolation. The end of this man, so grandly endowed, was untimely; it was terrible. I think their hearts were broken from that hour.

When the earth covered all that was mortal of Charles Sanford, one after another debts came in for the widow to settle. She paid every cent. When the last was cancelled there was nothing left of the village-house or the farm on the outskirts. Wearily, she turned toward the valley of the Alleghany; and to her death would have been a welcome boon but for the young souls who called her mother. It was but little to depend upon, this half of the river-farm, with no strong hand to till it, but Susan was skilful with the needle, and its sharp point pierced many a cloud and opened little rifts of light in what seemed impossible ways.

Across the Lakes a gray old man lifts his spectacles, and tears are on his face. His withered fingers clutch a newspaper. He is talking to himself. Let us listen.

"I feared it would come to this! Poor Sanford had no self-control. Keep him in the right company and he was a king; but fools lured him to ruin. Poor fellow! To die so! And he left a wife and children, in poverty, no doubt. Such men have nothing. If they gain they spend all. Look at my boys! Peers of the highest in the land. And I am indebted to Charles Sanford for the glory they have shed around the name of Peter Knight. He started them in the right way. Alas, that he did not lead them always as he once led. Yes, it is right. I have too much. And see how my hand shakes. It can't count gold very long. I will count it now. And there shall be three names among my boys instead of two. Thank God that I know this."

We turn away, glad to have heard this old man's soliloquy. We look into a thousand homes and hear young men and maidens in the flush of life and hope, and mature men and women wearing responsible honors, say as they read of this sad death, "Charles Sanford helped me. He taught me more, and better, than any other teacher."

In this grand confessional we see how fearful a thing it is to be "greatest" in intellect without the poise of a consecrated will. Self-abnegation, not self-seeking or self-indulgence, is the law of his life who has taken Christ as his guide. The toils of a servant, and not the aspirations of a king, are acceptable and pleasing in the sight of Him who, though King, took the form of a servant, and "went about doing good." In following Him men forget self. Worldly honors cease to charm. Appetite loses its allurements.

Passion is not master but subject. The whole man, body and soul, lives a life of daily worship in the deeds and duties which are inspired by the divine law, "all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye, even so unto them, for this is the law and the prophets."

"What can it be, my children?" said Susan Sanford, as she took a heavy package from the hand of a stranger who turned quickly away. "What can it be?" and she laid the burden on the table and began to tear away the paper fastenings which covered a more substantial casing of sheet iron. Then lifting the cover of the box, shining eyes looked in, glistening eyes looked in.

"It is gold, mamma, gold!" exclaimed the children. Their mother could not speak just then. Her swimming eyes were trying to decipher a little note which lay among the glittering coin. It read like this. "He helped my boys, made men of them. It is but paying an old debt."

After awhile Susan and her children counted the munificent gift. It took them some time. There was enough to bring up the little flock to be ornaments to society and helpers among men, enough to smooth the mother's rugged toil—life-long toil; too heavy for a frame like hers. The sky brightened. Hope spanned the future. In her heart this widow promised that her boys should redeem the family name, and by lives of strict virtue make the world forget the stain that obscured its glory in their gifted father. And to this end she counselled and kept watch.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE HILLS OF LIGHT.

WE cannot part company with the valley of the Alleghany, so charming in its native beauty, without lingering for a single vision of the change which revealed mysteries have written on the face of to-day. To be sure the wild grape still clammers over century-old trees. The mountains lift their heads in the same defiant grandeur as when we first uncovered ours for a reverent gaze upon them. The river goes singing on its winding way, now through groves which were once dense forests, now through green meadows where a little while ago the squirrel leaped from bough to bough of giant oaks.

But the oaks have been felled to make rafts, and the shining river is no longer a polished mirror. It is ploughed by the keels of commerce, it is eddied and whirled and lashed into foam.

Vinetown has widened to the very borders of the river-farm. It has many streets, and each is closely walled by the houses of men who have come hither from the East and the West, from the North and the South, to see the wonders of the place. Yes, they came to see! But behind the eyes of man are other faculties which push him in the path of exploration.

It was not alone to look upon the mystery revealed in this valley that the motley multitude gathered and built their homes. They came to the margin of this mighty marvel of the age to chain it, each to the wheel of his own mill. They would make this more than Niagara grind and saw for them. By the power which God bestowed in the beginning when he gave man dominion over the earth, that power which has harnessed fire and lightning so that they do his bidding like the ox and the horse, the drops of this river which burst suddenly out of the earth were turned into light for his home, bread for his table, garments for his children, and gold in his purse and coffers.

The streets were graded and paved by it, the school-house reared and endowed, the church enlarged and beautified. The town grew as if by magic. The people rushed to and fro, busy with schemes which knotted their faces; bent with toil which shed its glamour of promise over the smut and grime.

The vision which came long ago to Wesley Sanford, as he listened to the ringing axes on the frosty air, is more than realized. He hears yet the ring of the axe, but the bells of Vinetown are more and sweeter than the chimes of city churches, and the beckoning voice of one invites the citizen and stranger, the speculator and the wayfarer, to the promulgation of the dear faith for which he has toiled with a single eye. Soft carpets hush the tread of busy feet as they seek the silence and help of this house of God. Faces of old saints and martyrs look down from the frescoed walls. The tones of the organ dissipate the voices of traffic, and call the souls of the multitude to reverent worship.

The voice of the preacher in this new church, which many hands helped to build, is clearer than the tones of bell and organ and more musical. But it is not the voice which first preached God, the Father, in Vinetown. George Marks has finished his work and gone home. We believe his voice is now that of an angel, singing hallelujahs in unison with all the white throng in the midst of which is the Lamb who was slain, and near His feet this preacher of the Word presses and bows down, hand in hand with the lost Ada. George Marks was one of the blessed number to whom the Lord opens the door of His house at the noon of life, when the toil is too heavy for any earthly rest.

In the midst of the congregation which gathers Sunday after Sunday in this pleasant church may be seen occasionally a tall form and fine face. Locks of iron gray hair fall carelessly over a head of uncommon strength. The eye glistens, and tears steal into it sometimes as the eloquence of the preacher stirs his heart. The desire of life is reached at last, and Thomas and Mary Jones thank God continually that there was once a cradle in their house which was not rocked empty.

They have guarded well their gift. They have given him the best helps, and surrounded him by the pleasant light of opportunity, and now as great congregations listen reverently to his word they feel that God's blessings have been sent in showers, and their cup of bliss runs over. From the "borders of Palestine" to the banks of the Alleghany these happy parents journey many times and oft to spend Sunday with their promising son. They generally spend

more than Sunday. They can afford to live easy now. Thomas and Mary Jones are rich.

And when this pair, who are living illustrations of the true faith, go for a visit to Vinetown, others desire a sight of their honest faces besides Thomas Jones, junior.

They go to the outskirts of the town, to its sunny uplands, and climb the steps of a family mansion, the finest in all the valley or along the sloping hills. A man who has climbed the hill of life sits back in his easy chair and waits for his friends. His hair, too, is iron gray. He is basking now in the golden afternoon of a well-spent day. No longer his well-known figure is seen along the valley-roads, hastening to the relief of distress, except in singular and urgent cases, where he is sent for as counsel. Horace, the son of Isadore, who has been taught and trained into a true man by the careful hand of his uncle, has taken on the mantle of the old doctor, and is bending the best energies of his life to do his work.

The rocks are past now and the way is smooth at last. To Wesley Sanford the promise has come in its richest verification, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Every good which the lap of earth can yield has been poured into his lap, and her very heart has sent its currents to enrich him. The river-farm has overflowed in rivers of oil, and of all the multitude of seekers from other places to none has the wealth of this mysterious stream been given in such abundance as to him. He sits at ease, happy in the love of all who know him, happy in the memory of his past toils and endeavors. And not the least

among his sources of joy is the pleasant relationship which now binds more closely the inmates of this family mansion to the honest pair who come so often from the "borders of Palestine" to charming Vine-town. It was Dr. Sanford's desire that one of his own sons should choose the ministry as a profession. But as his boys preferred other avenues of toil, he is glad to call the son of Thomas Jones his son, and know that his daughter is a faithful and efficient minister's wife.

Mercy no longer sighs for the privileges of a finer type of life; they have come to her in all their old-world abundance. Her rooms are wide enough to gather and shelter all whom she desires as inmates or guests.

These givers and helpers see their measure pressed down, shaken together, and running over. Their bosoms glow with gratitude, and for all gifts, temporal and spiritual, the host and hostess and their welcome guests return thanks to God the Father.

As they talk of other days, and the blindness of Horace Ryder, how plainly they discern the shining footprints of divine justice in the reward which cometh to every man according to his works. The faith they cherish has its visible evidence in the ways and issues of the life that now is, while it opens luminous portals to the "house not made with hands eternal in the heavens."

Susan, the widow, draws near the gleaming lamp and adjusts her spectacles. A pleasant light steals over her face as she turns the fair pages before her.

As she pauses amid the glowing passages, in memory of her singular and eventful life, she can now see more sun than shadow, more flowers than thorns. In the midst of experience she has learned to philosophize wisely, and now fully believes that it required just such subtle blending of mental and moral powers, just such a discipline, just such sad and haunting memories, to weave the intense lines over which her mother-heart lingers; and as she sees her counsel ripe in deeds, her watchfulness answered in consecrated life, she thanks God that His ways of mystery have running through them the silver threads of a divine plan, whose issue is life and light and everlasting peace.

To her, life's evening is better than its morning, for she sees, not only by the light of memory, but by the larger light of faith—and the morning which shall succeed the evening where she now sits with folded hands she fully believes will be the morning of that everlasting day where "they need no candle, neither the light of the sun; and they shall reign forever and ever."

And in her vision of the glory of that day she sees her husband, "sitting clothed, and in his right mind."

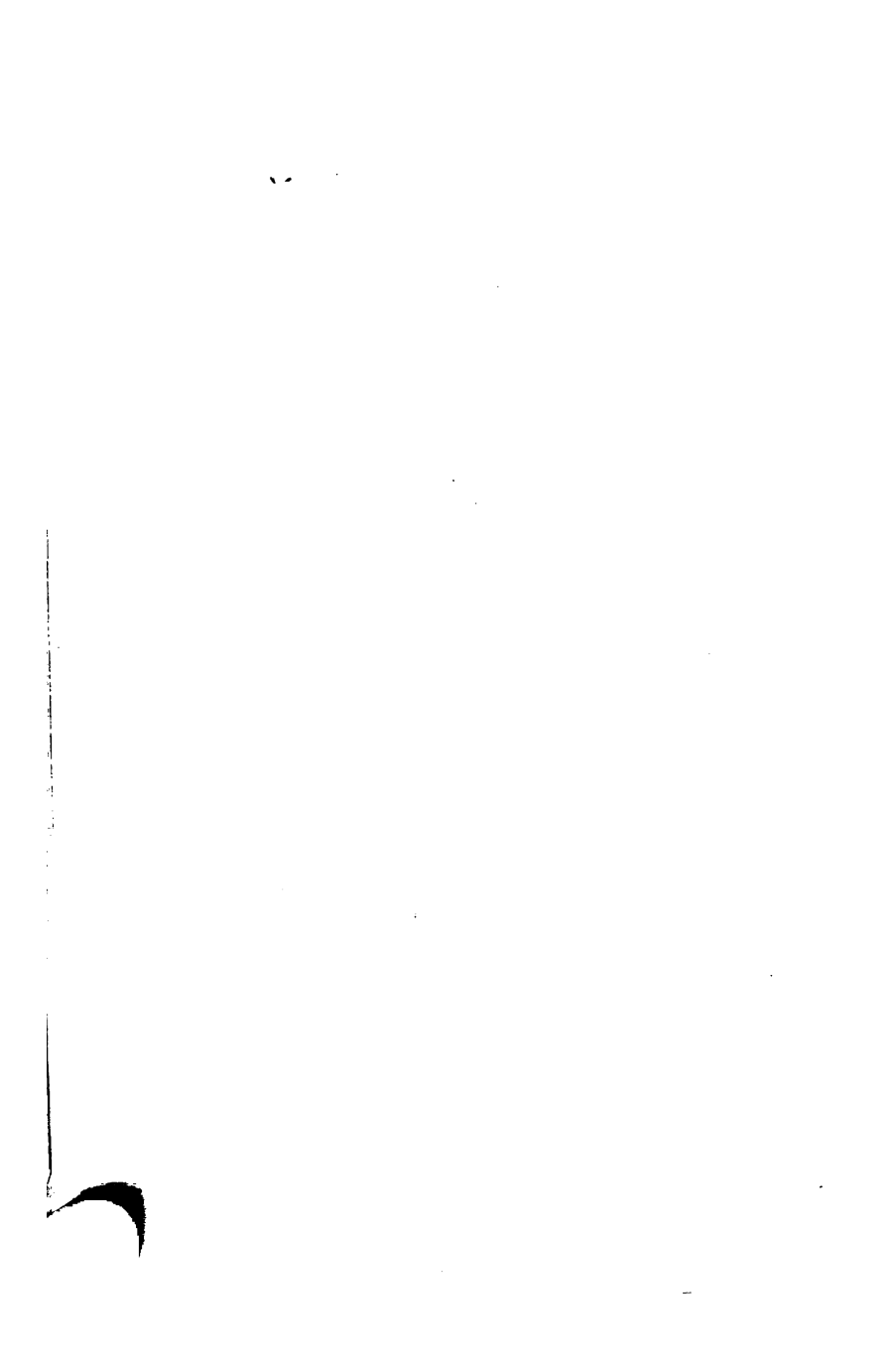
The children of Wesley and Charles Sanford have taken their places in life, and are among its busy toilers. Some of them work with the hand; some with the brain. Some turn the soil of productive valleys, some plough the everlasting fields of thought; and some are crowned victors, and others struggle up slippery steeps, hoping in God for victory at last; while the parental heart here, and from beyond, watches and encourages and cheers their way. To

old defeats it points as sentinels of warning, and to each higher round in the ladder of virtuous aspiration it bids the struggling soul look in hope.

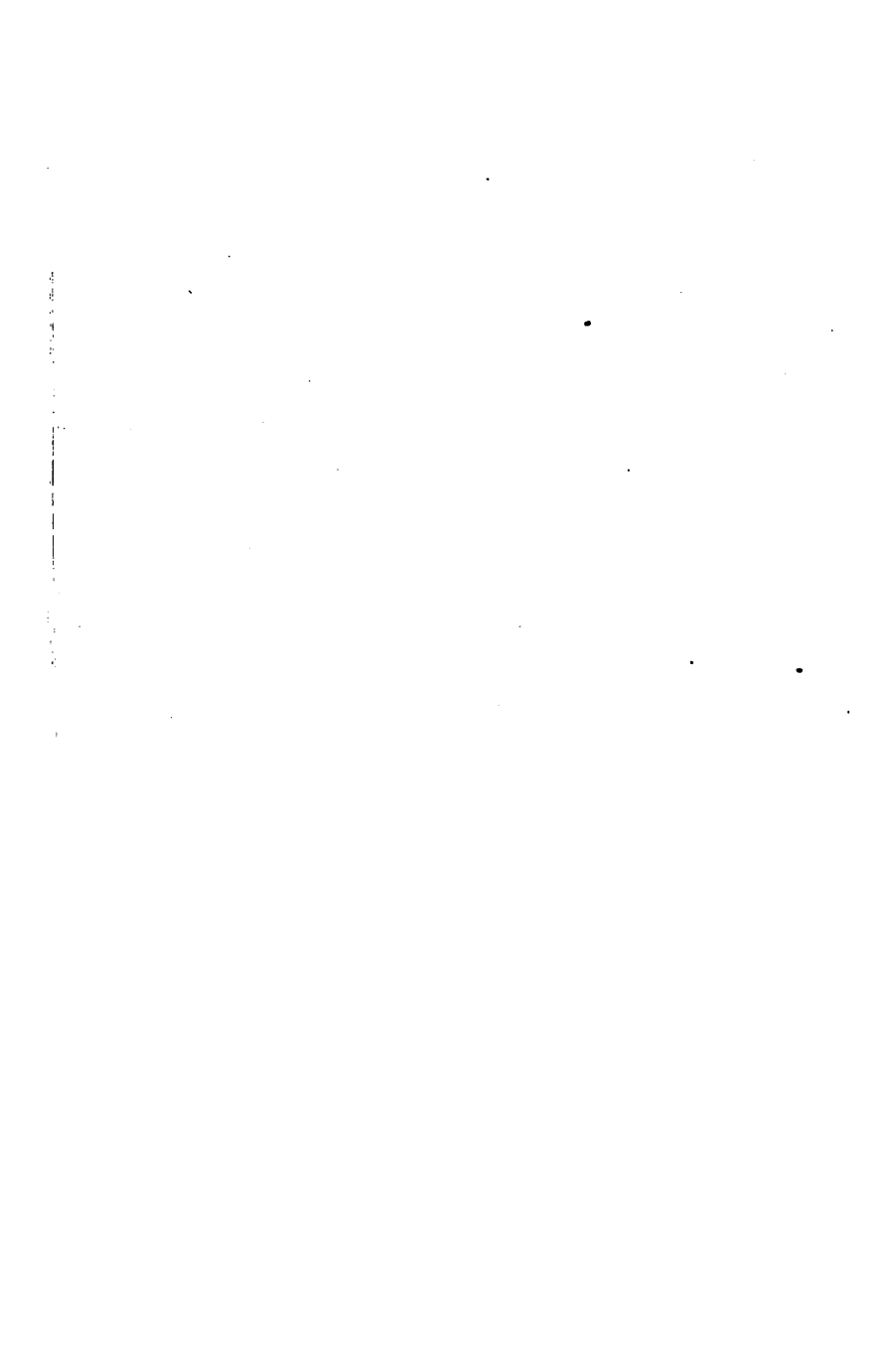
And what of Ned? little Ned, who suggested the quaint title of my story?

He is older now by a year, and fuller than ever of his prying, inquisitive speeches. And if you turn the tables, and ask him a question, — that question which is so often put to little boys — “What are you going to do when you are a man?” there is one invariable answer which he has repeated ever since he could talk: “Neddy is going to write big books with a pen, Neddy is.”

God grant that he, and all who read my story, may write the book of a true life, — a life whose outer manifestations are the voice of a holy purpose and consecrated will in the realm OUT OF SIGHT.









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